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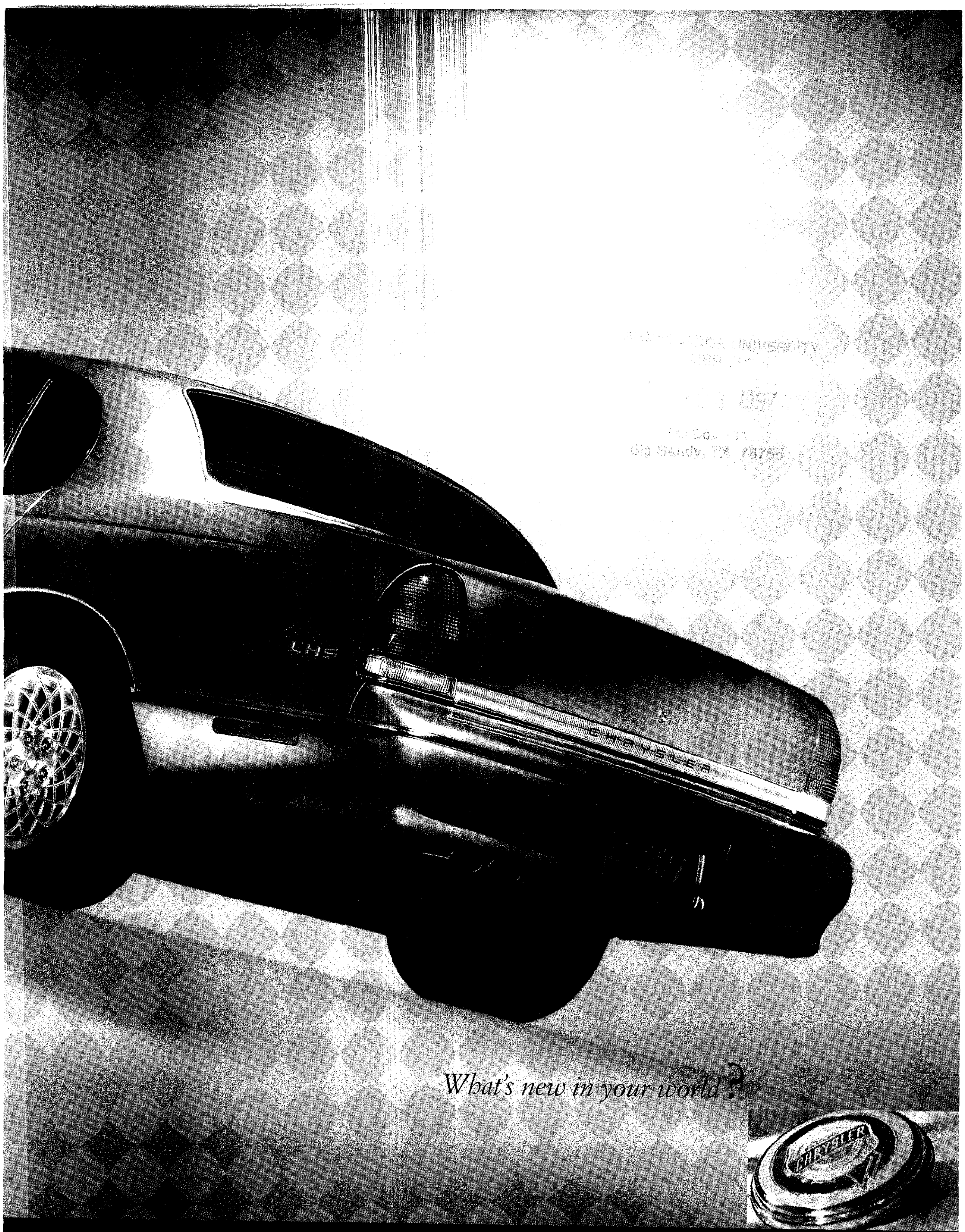
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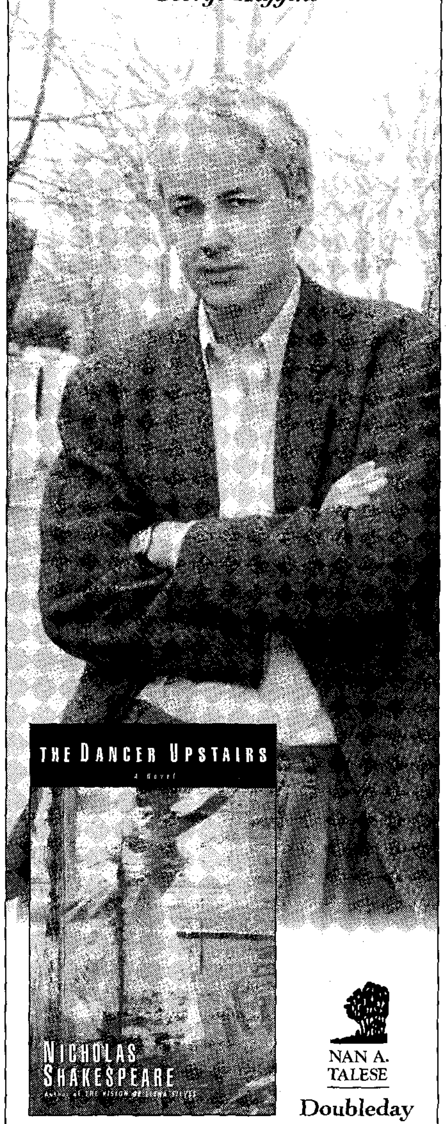

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JANUARY 27, 1997

COMMENT Courtroom vs. Newsroom . . . . *Jeffrey Toobin* 5
Richard Jewell, the Cowboys, JonBenet Ramsey, and media burn.

THE MAIL 8

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN 10

THE TALK OF THE TOWN 27
Terrorists' home shopping; moving Jane Bowles; etc.

DEPARTMENTS
Letter from Washington The Consultant . . . . *Joe Klein* 30
Has Dick Morris permanently changed Presidential politics?

Our Local Correspondents Speaking Across the Divide . . . . *John Lahr* 35
Harlem's Eliza Doolittles find a better way to be heard.

ANNALS OF SPACE Is This the End? . . . . *Timothy Ferris* 44
Flood, fire, darkness, cold, and famine would descend if a major comet were to crash into the Earth—and scientists are seriously worried.

FICTION "People Like That Are the Only People Here" . . . . *Lorrie Moore* 58
Have writers of memoirs taken over a field that once belonged to novelists? The question is at the heart of a story of a mother and child.

THE CRITICS
Books Robert Fagles's "Odyssey" . . . . *Garry Wills* 74
Briefly Noted 76
Patrick McGrath's "Asylum" . . . . *John Lanchester* 78
Showcase Redmond O'Hanlon . . . . *Dudley Reed, Bill Buford* 80
The Current Cinema "The Whole Wide World," "Some Mother's Son" . . . . *Terrence Rafferty* 82
The Theatre The playwright Martin McDonagh . . . . *John Lahr* 84
Bill Irwin's "Scapin," Charlayne Woodard's "Neat" . . . . *Nancy Franklin* 86

POEMS
"Rain in Sibiu" . . . . *Liliana Ursu* 38
"Love in Place" . . . . *Nikki Giovanni* 55

SHOUTS & MURMURS Beltway Bazaar . . . . *Christopher Buckley* 88

COVER *Hot, Hot, Hot, by Art Spiegelman*

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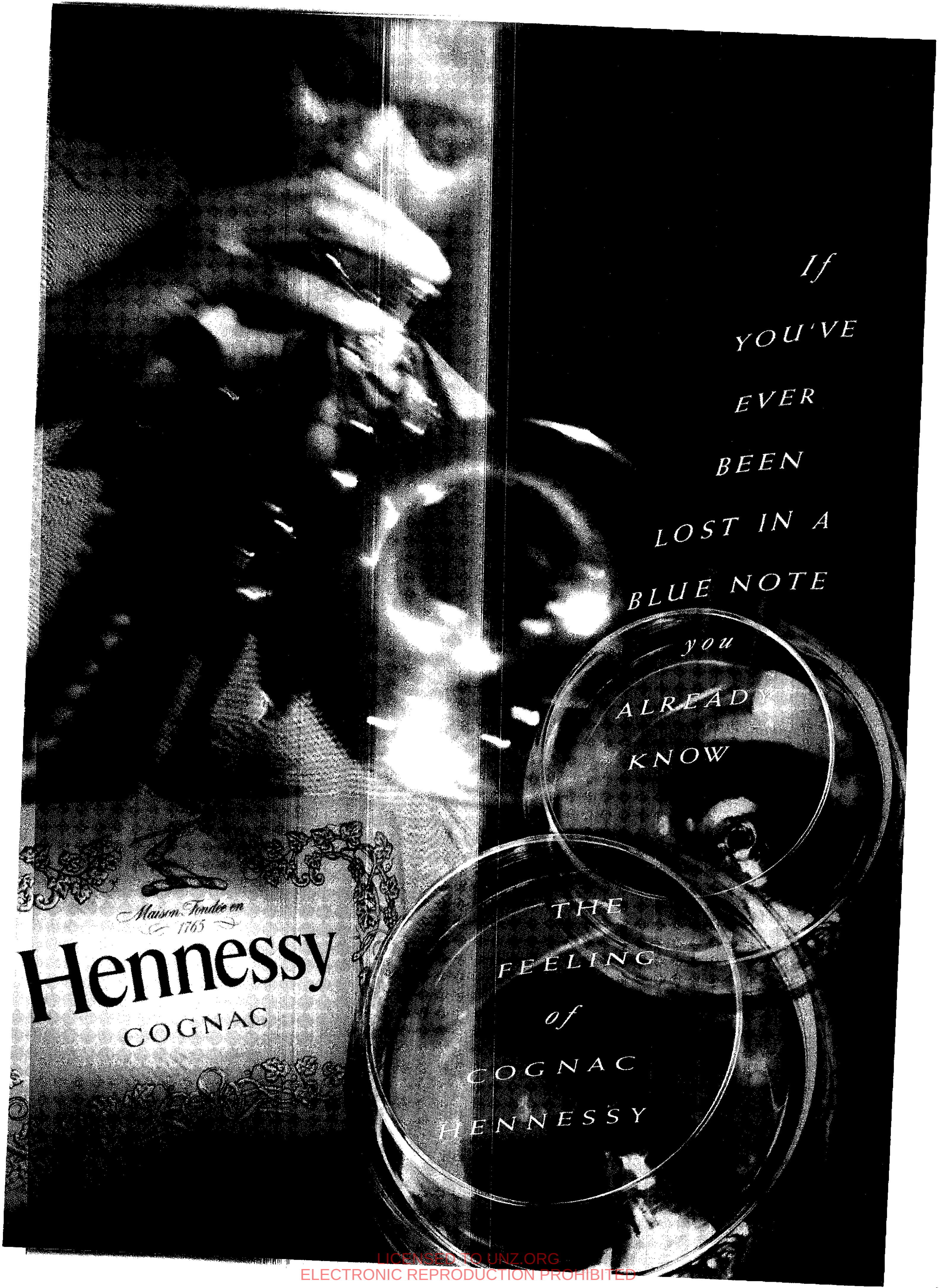
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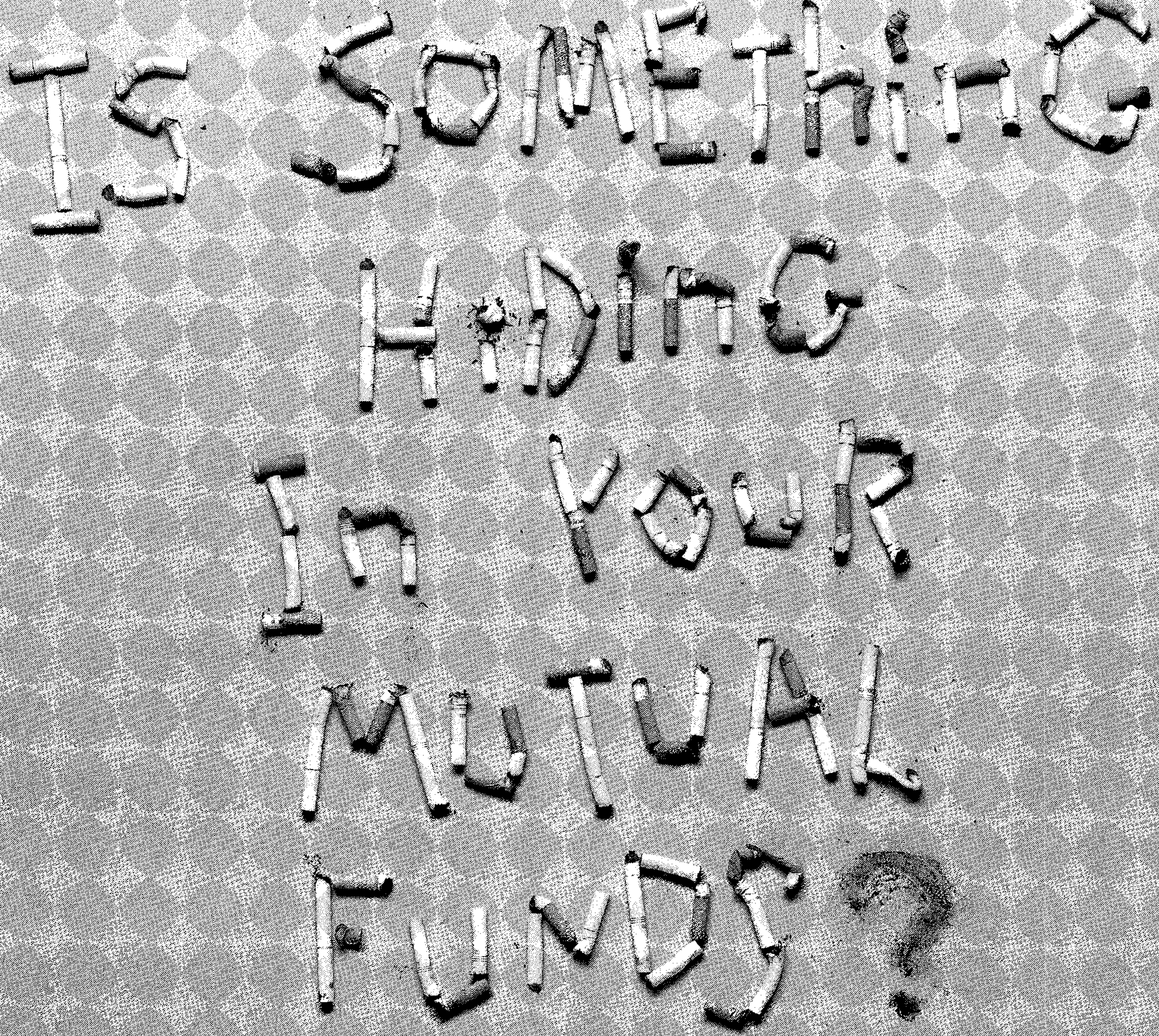

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COMMENT

COURTROOM VS. NEWSROOM

What's inadmissable is not necessarily unpublishable.

The victory lap of Richard Jewell's martyrdom tour has had him on the talk-show circuit in recent days. Jewell, of course, is the former Atlanta security guard who was suspected, for a time, of planting the bomb in Centennial Olympic Park last July 27th. On October 26th, after a three-month investigation, the Feds announced that Jewell was no longer a suspect, and ever since then the media establishment has been falling prostrate before him. NBC is reported to have paid him a half-million-dollar settlement in December to avoid a libel suit based on the network's having named him as the lead suspect in the case. His lawyers boast that more lawsuits against media targets are in the works.

Following close behind Jewell in the race to become the American media-age Dreyfus were Michael Irvin and Erik Williams, of the Dallas Cowboys. On December 29th, a former topless dancer named Nina Shahravan filed a sworn statement with the Dallas police that Williams and another man had sexually assaulted her after Irvin held a gun to her head. The charge had at least a surface plausibility, because of the two athletes' records: Irvin was and is on probation for felony drug possession, and Williams had been accused of rape in 1995 by a seventeen-year-old dancer. (He made an out-of-court settlement, and no charges were filed.) The police obviously took Shahravan's story seriously enough to follow up on it, but on January 10th they announced that it had been disproved. The following week, Shahravan herself was charged with filing a false police report—a charge that was later upgraded to perjury. Leaving a bar on the day he was cleared, Irvin told the assembled cameras, "Rerun it, rewrite it, reprint it—just like you did, with the same intensity that you did." By and large, reporters obliged. A headline in the *Times* noted earnestly, "A Woman's False Accusation Prompts Reflection."

And so it should. Media folk would rather think of themselves as speaking truth to power than as spreading falsehoods about the powerless. And the spectacle of Richard Jewell—immobilized for three months by a round-the-clock media stake-out—showed none of those responsible to advantage. The mass media had never looked more massive. Reputation is more easily wrecked than rescued, and when a private citizen comes up against the armored divisions of the networks it isn't exactly an even match. Who can begrudge the innocent victim of such an onslaught his rightful vindication?

And yet it's worth noting exactly what

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"I guess what I miss most is being drunk."

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it was that most journalists did in both the Jewell and the Cowboy cases: they printed and broadcast the news. In the former case, a horrific crime had occurred—one that left two people dead and a hundred and eleven injured. It quickly became apparent, both through leaks and through the F.B.I.'s quasi-public surveillance of Jewell himself, that the former security guard was a suspect. As for the two football players, they are among the most famous people in the Dallas area, and the police held a news conference announcing that they were investigating Shahravan's charges. All respectable news operations gave the appropriate caveats—that the suspects had not been charged with, much less convicted of, any crime—but all three men were in fact under investigation, and the press was right to report it.

To suggest otherwise confuses the rules of the courtroom with those of the newsroom. In our criminal-justice system, the preëminent value is to protect the innocent from unjust conviction. Accordingly, judges are supposed to limit what jurors may hear to the most reliable, concrete, and narrowly relevant evidence. The press, on the other hand, seeks to promote the free flow of information that it believes in good faith to be factual, on the theory that readers can then make their own judgments. The hearsay rule illustrates the point nicely. The President's press secretary, for instance, may announce that the First Family watched the Super Bowl on television in the White House living quarters, even though he didn't see them doing it. That's hearsay, but no journalist would hesitate to report it. A lot of routine reporting (and virtually all investigative journalism) relies on hearsay, which is generally not allowed in courtrooms. The differing values dictate the differing standards of admissibility. It doesn't and shouldn't require a conviction, or even a formal charge, to trigger legitimate public scrutiny of a criminal investigation.

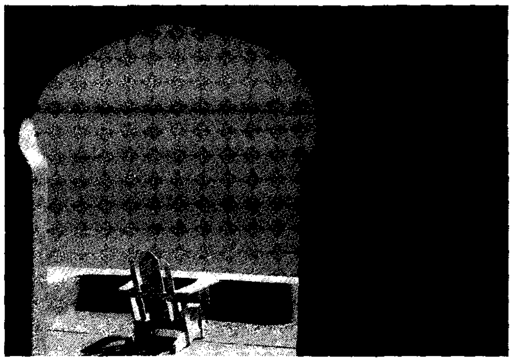
This same confusion of values has generated perplexity in another great criminal sensation of the moment—the murder of JonBenet Ramsey, in Boulder, Colorado. As everyone now knows, the six-year-old beauty-pageant veteran was found murdered in her parents' house on the day after Christmas. Her parents—like everyone else in the house at the time of the killing—are potential suspects in the case, but they have been oddly unforthcoming in their dealings with the police. In a news analysis (though not in a courtroom summation), it's fair to point out that their silence appears bizarre at best and suspicious at worst.

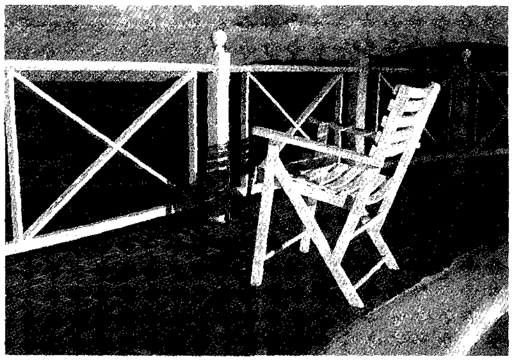
These days, the sheer numbers of reporters chasing a hot story—print, broadcast, cable, on-line, and free-lance "infotainment"—can create for their targets a chamber of horrors. Richard Jewell went through hell for several months, but at least his story has a reasonably happy ending: in addition to enjoying NBC's bankable appeasement, he is now famous mostly for being the one person on earth officially certified by the United States government as not having planted the bomb in Centennial Park. (President Clinton has compared himself to Jewell, and he meant it as a compliment to them both.) Irvin and Williams suffered, too, and it's only fair to hope that their dismal reputations don't sink further because of Shahravan's false allegations.

The Ramsey case is the hardest of all. If the parents' silence is simply the product of advice from overzealous defense lawyers, it's awful to see their tragedy compounded. The press routinely makes hard calls, and it doesn't always make them right. Nobody has ever figured out how to report suspicions without spreading them, but the alternative—to limit what journalists report to what jurors may hear—is no alternative at all. The human costs are real, but what they demand from journalists is sober reflection, not self-flagellation.

—Jeffrey Toobin

Stay Awhile





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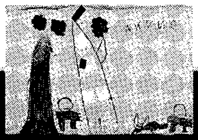

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WOODY'S WOES

A case can be made for the irrelevance of an artist's personal life in discussions of his work, but I can't help wondering whether John Lahr would have written a sympathetic article like "The Imperfectionist" (December 9th) about Woody Allen and his relationship with Soon-Yi Previn had their genders been reversed. Suppose a well-known and respected actress and director became involved with the college-age son of her male lover of many years. Would Lahr confine his analysis to how that artist is able to draw upon her personal relationships and create complex male characters in her movies? Allen's partners are presented primarily as nourishing inspiration and valuable material, but, at the very least, Allen has demonstrated the capacity for profound betrayal of those who love and trust him. I'm not surprised that he is so anxious to escape reality.

ELISABETH OCHS
San Francisco, Calif.

Woody Allen fashioned a comic persona that delighted many Americans but eventually exasperated its dreadfully serious creator. He seemed to welcome the scandal over his pitiful affair—he needed to publicly hammer a stake through the heart of his alter ego. How lucky for his box-office receipts that his essential coldness and moral snobbery haven't (yet) crossed the language barrier. I don't think he will ever comprehend that it wasn't seriousness in his films that his onetime American admirers grew to dislike—it was Allen himself.

MAVE LAWLER
Chicago, Ill.

I was surprised to read that Woody Allen disagrees with the Romantic poet John Keats's famous proposition "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." Perhaps Allen thinks that Keats equated "truth" with reality. Not so. In 1817, Keats wrote, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth." As one of the great Romantics of the twentieth century, Allen can rest assured that his imaginative worlds are beauty *and* truth.

EARL L. DACHSLAGER
The Woodlands, Texas

PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES

In a review of Ray Monk's new biography of Bertrand Russell ("Sex and Reason," December 9th), Clive James remarks that there is no culture of science, and to provide a framework for his judgment he asserts that "the mark of culture is to accumulate quality," whereas science "merely advances knowledge." In my view, James has made the fundamental error of many nonscientists in believing science to be an algorithm that "settles its questions within itself." Scientists know that questions are not settled; rather, they are given provisional answers for which it is contingent upon the imagination of followers to find more illuminating solutions. Practitioners of science are different from artists in that they give primacy to logic and evidence, but the most fundamental progress in science is achieved through hunch, analogy, insight, and creativity. The culture of science is one that allows for both rigor and fluidity, an amalgam that, though quite different from nonscientific culture, is no less valuable.

DAVID BALTIMORE
Ivan R. Cottrell Professor of Molecular Biology and Immunology
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Mass.

Did Bertrand Russell do some harm to Clive James that would justify such a venomous article? A man who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950 could not be as horrible a writer as James claims. A literary portrait of one of the greatest philosophers of our time should include more than an account of his "testicular agitation."

EMANUEL TANAY
Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.

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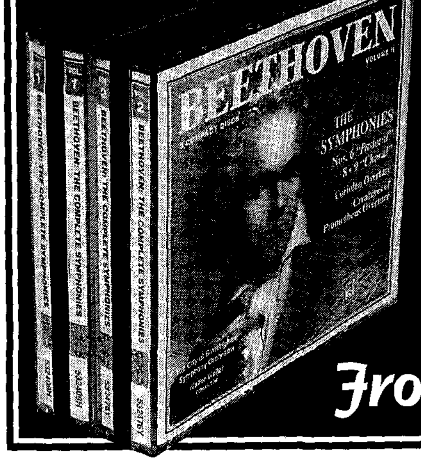

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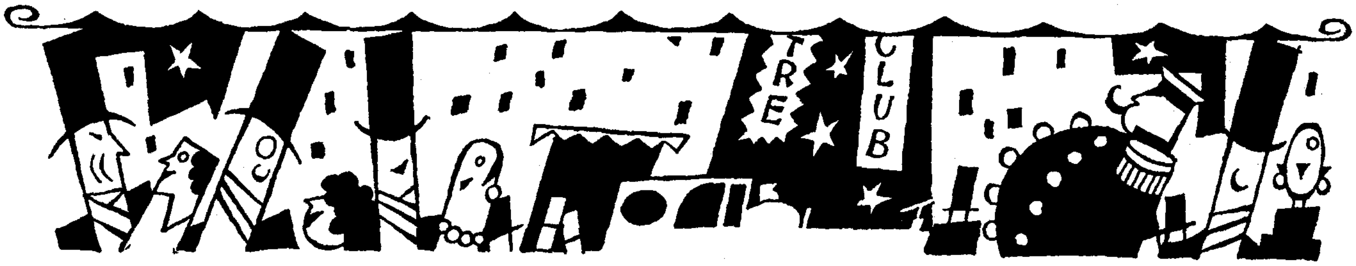

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Dreamstuff—A new musical based on the Aladdin tale, but updated to the nineteen-nineties, starring Carol Woods, Louise DuArt, and Aileen Quinn. With music and lyrics by Sal Lombarde and book by John Pantozzi. In previews. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

Minutes from the Blue Route—Elizabeth Franz, Catherine Kellner, Matt McGrath, and Stephen Mendillo star in Tom Donaghy's family drama, directed by David Warren. In previews. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

My Astonishing Self—Donal Donnelly portrays George Bernard Shaw, in a one-man show created by Michael Voysey from the playwright's letters, diaries, speeches, and other writings. Preview on Jan. 22. Opens Jan. 23 at 7. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man with a fetish, stars Jon Lovitz, Margaret Colin, Edward Herrmann, Andrew McCarthy, and Park Overall. Daniel Sullivan is the director. Previews begin Jan. 28. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Three Sisters—Amy Irving, Lili Taylor, and Jeanne Tripplehorn portray Chekhov's trio and Billy Crudup, Eric Stoltz, and David Strathairn their suitors, in a Roundabout Theatre staging directed by Scott Elliott. Previews begin Jan. 22. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Beat: A Subway Cop's Comedy—John DiResta, New York City transit policeman and standup comic, files a report on his subterranean workplace. (Kaufman, 534 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

A Brief History of White Music—A comic revue by Dee Dee Thomas and David Tweedy, in which an all-black cast interprets the music of Sonny and Cher, the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and other honkies. (Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the 1975 Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking, who co-stars with Bebe Neuwirth) has enough razzle-dazzle and flashes of lucid sarcasm to set the audience cheering almost from the start. The story is about a woman who gets away with murder; this pared-down concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Concert Pianist—In a new one-man comedy written by and starring Barry Neikrug, a master pianist attempts to find a compatible teacher. A Jewish Repertory Theatre production. (Closes Feb. 2.) (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

A Devil Inside—SoHo Rep presents a dark comedy by David Lindsay Abaire. (46 Walker St. 334-0962.)

Do Lord Remember Me—The New Federal Theatre's twentieth-anniversary production of James de Jongh's drama, based on the stories of men and women born into slavery. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448.)

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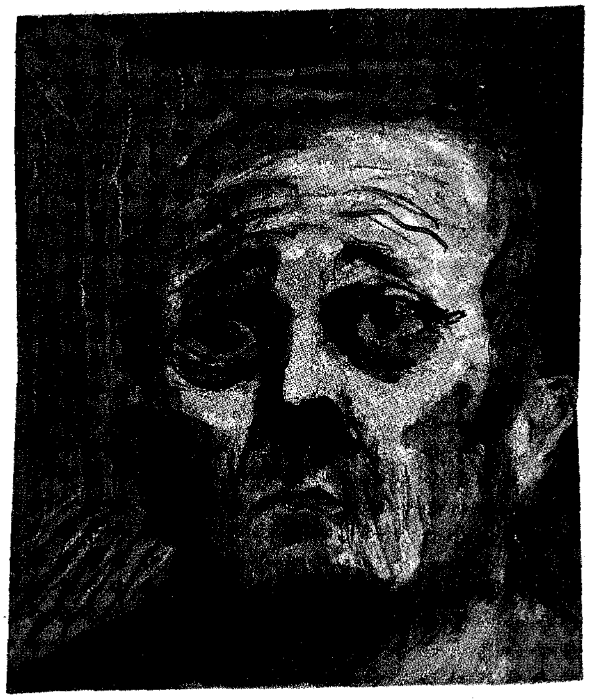
Family Values—A sex comedy by the Canadian playwright Carl Ritchie. Ed (Joel Fabiani) is a blustery podiatrist who longs for the days when his ex-wife (Ellen Evans) would rub his feet for hours on end; he also wishes that his son weren't, as he puts it, a "fruit," and that his daughter weren't "boinking" her boyfriend. Daniel Ettinger's set, an apartment awash in chintz, is much more tasteful than the sitcomlike proceedings. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 358-5174.)



Donal McCann, in "The Steward of Christendom."

Flipping My Wig—Charles Busch drags in the New Year with a new one-woman revue. With music by Dick Gallagher and Rusty Magee and lyrics by Mr. Busch. (WPA, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes Jan. 26.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in the latest edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue*, it's rich and resonant, with much to say about life that's worth hearing. A thoroughly satisfying evening in the theatre—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly—The exuberant designer Howard Crabtree died last June, and this revue of witty, satiric songs (created with and written and directed by Mark Waldrop, and sung by a talented cast dressed in Crabtree's sequinned, feathered, mind-boggling costumes) is a fitting cap to his career. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change—In made-for-musical-theatre voices, the appealing cast of Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts's crowd-pleasing revue about love and marriage sings songs examining made-for-musical-theatre issues. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Jean Cocteau Repertory—The Eric Bentley–Darius Milhaud adaptation of Brecht's "Mother Courage and Her Children" runs in repertory with Aphra Behn's Restoration comedy "The Lucky Chance." (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive, but it's all too clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

June Moon—The Drama Dept. presents George S. Kaufman and Ring Lardner's 1929 musical comedy about a Tin Pan Alley songwriter, starring Cynthia Nixon, Becky Ann Baker, Albert Macklin, and Robert Joy. Mark Nelson is the director. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 629-4656. Closes Jan. 26.)

La Mama—Jan. 22-26 at 7: East Coast Artists' production of Chekhov's "Three Sisters," directed by Richard Schechner. Continues through Feb. 2. . . .¶ Jan. 23-25 at 10: "Telethon," starring David Ilku and Ken Bullock. Continues through Feb. 1. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

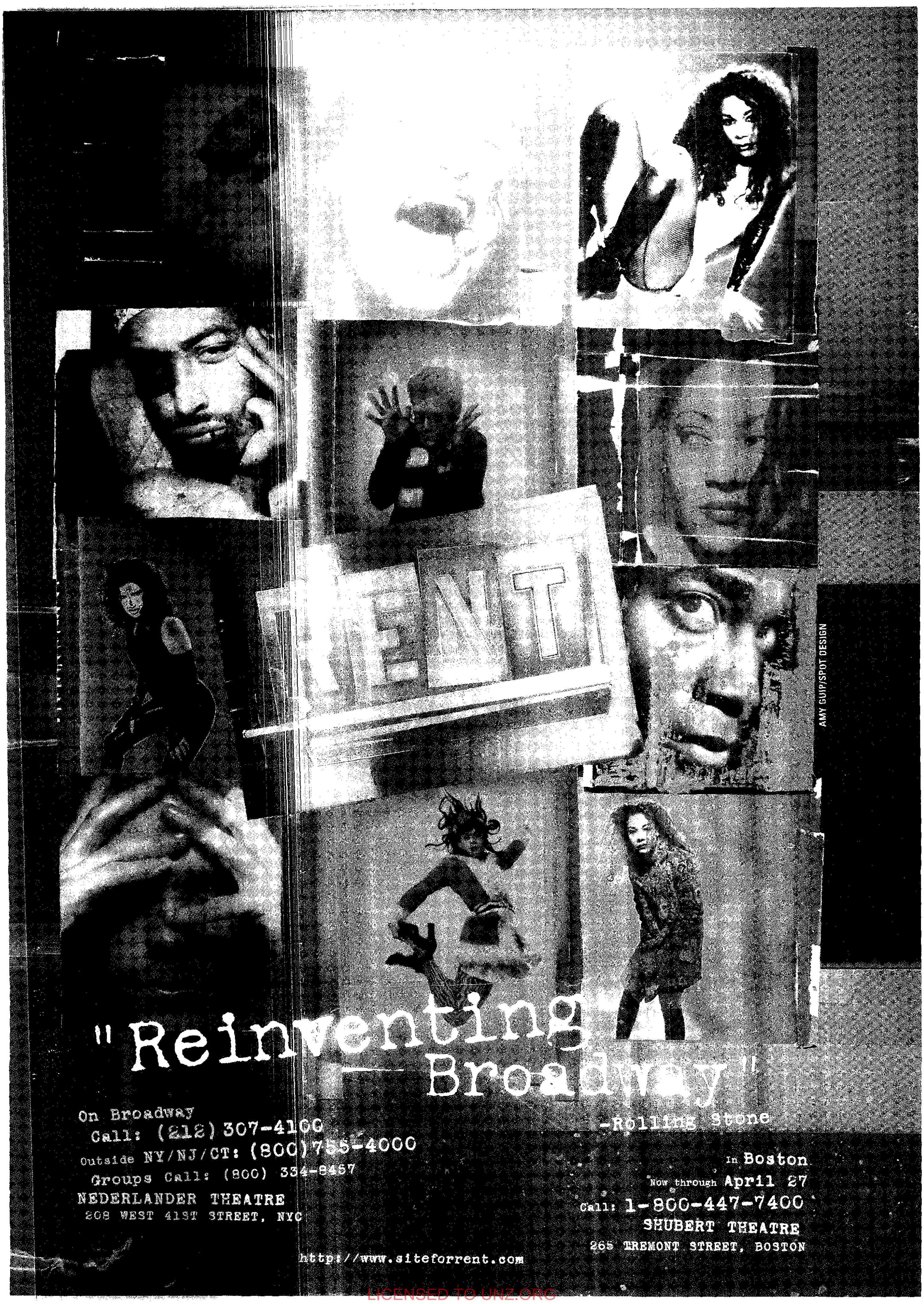
Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan offers a commandingly funny performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class, and the audience brings as much to the performance as the script does. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Marking—Infidelity breeds death and chaos, in a dark comedy written by Patrick Breen and directed by Elizabeth Gottlieb. The cast includes Maria Tucci. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 9.)

Message to Michael—*Another comedy-drama about gay men searching for love in* New York City? If that's your attitude, then Rattlestick Productions' latest staging may not be your cup of tea. All the same, the young playwright Tim Pinckney shows a keen talent for witty dialogue and the well-timed one-liner in a depiction of gay culture which is happier and gentler than some of its predecessors. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556. Closes Feb. 2.)

Mock Trial—Romulus Linney directs Theatre for the New City's production of his drama about a moot-court examination of a charismatic defendant. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes Feb. 9.)

Neat—Charlayne Woodard's new one-woman show, a memoir of growing up in the sixties, is a companion to her "Pretty Fire," which she



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performed here in 1993. Directed by Tazewell Thompson. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Feb. 9.)

No Way to Treat a Lady—The York Theatre Company begins an all-musical season—its first ever—with a comedy-thriller based on the William Goldman novel of the same title, about a detective in pursuit of an actor turned murderer. Book, music, and lyrics by Douglas J. Cohen. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Feb. 2.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist (Justin Kirk) find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher (Hal Robinson) who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) (9/16/96) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Once Upon a Mattress—Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's 1959 musical, based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea," has topnotch production values but very little reason for being, unless you have a fondness for dumb, Eisenhower-era sex jokes and marshmallowy melodies. That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Permanent Brain Damage—Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre's latest attempt to stop making sense is, strictly speaking, successful, but this new work is jarringly assaultive rather than jarringly provocative. Still, there's nothing like its surpassing, indescribable strangeness to be found in any other theatre, and it will knock some of the dust off your brain. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. But he orchestrates some delicious farce moments, and the supporting players are funny even when Elliott is leading them down blind alleys. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical—Love and music triumph over evil, in a new play by Amiri Baraka, with music by David Murray. (Nuyorican Poets Café, 236 E. 3rd St. 465-3167.)

P.S. 122—Jan. 23-26 at 7:30: The performance group Elevator Repair Service, in "Cab Legs," a work in progress influenced by popular Indian cinema. Continues through Feb. 2. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

The Red Address—A businessman's public persona belies the circumstances of his passionate private life, in a psychological drama written by David Ives and starring Kevin Anderson. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103. Closes Feb. 2.)

Repertorio Español—Performances of "El Cano" ("The Blond Man"), Louis Delgado's drama about an ambitious Puerto Rican who allows his boss to believe he is Italian, and "La Gringa," Carmen Rivera's comedy about a woman's first trip to Puerto Rico to meet her relatives, run in repertory with "Dominican Serenade," a revue of popular and classical music from the Dominican Republic. Most performances are in Spanish, with simultaneous English translation available. (Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850.)

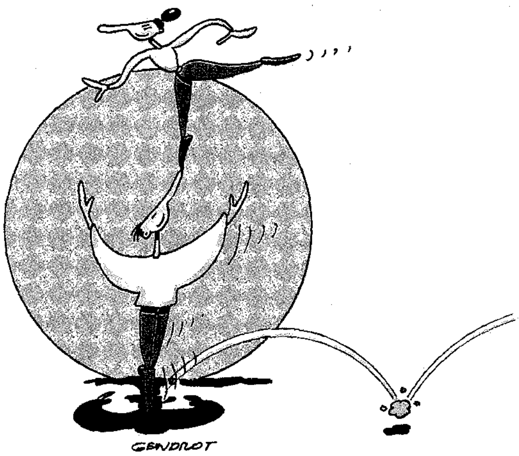
Scapin—Bill Irwin and Mark O'Donnell's adaptation of Molière's comedy "The Rogueries of Scapin," directed by and starring Mr. Irwin. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Second-Hand Smoke—In his latest play, Mac Wellman ruminates on the state of America at the end of the twentieth century. The cast includes Joanna Adler, David Greenspan, and Kristine Nielsen. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes Feb. 9.)

South—The playwright, novelist, and essayist Julian Green's 1953 drama, about a Polish military officer's visit to a Carolina plantation, is set on the night before the outbreak of the War Between the States. A Target Margin Theatre staging. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes Feb. 2.)

The Steward of Christendom—The Irish playwright Sebastian Barry's drama is set in 1932 in a County Wicklow mental home, and its title character is based on his great-grandfather, a Catholic loyalist to the British throne who was the last chief superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police before the establishment of the Irish Free State. Starring Donal McCann and directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music. (Majestic, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

The Two Gentlemen of Verona—It's not entirely clear why the company inhabiting the newly rebuilt Globe Theatre, in London, would choose this very early, very slight play for its first endeavor, or why Theatre for a New Audience would bring it here. Luckily, the weakness of the script didn't prevent the director, Jack Shepherd, from creating a lively production with many bits of clever stage business. Though the plot is obvious enough for even young children to follow, adults can content themselves with the actors' almost but not quite over-the-top comic performances (particularly by Lennie James, as one of the gentlemen, and Stephanie Roth, as Julia). This is also an opportunity to see a fairly close reproduction of the theatrical conditions under which Shakespeare's actors worked; the production will appeal to the whole family, one way or another. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 25.)



Vilna's Got a Golem—In a new play by Ernest Joselovitz, set in a small Eastern European town in 1889, a government censor attends the opening-night performance of a Yiddish theatre troupe's controversial production. With musical accompaniment by members of the Klezmer Conservatory Band. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797. Closes Feb. 2.)

Whiplash: A Tale of a Tomboy—Shelly Mars's autobiographical one-woman show. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St., at Bleecker St. 631-1000. Closes Feb. 16.)

You Say What I Mean But What You Mean Is Not What I Said—The Foundry Theatre presents a Hot Mouth production, an original a-cappella music-theatre piece written by Grisha Coleman. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 777-1441. Closes Feb. 9.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **AN IDEAL HUSBAND:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200. (Closes Jan. 26.) . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Jan. 22 at 8: "Apollo," the première of Jerome Robbins's "Brandenburg," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 8: "Interplay," "Red Angels," "Brandenburg," and "Symphony in C." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: "Swan Lake," "Schoenberg/Wuorinen Variations," and "Vienna Waltzes." . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 2: "Interplay," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Brandenburg," and "Symphony in C." . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8: "Circus Polka," "Interplay," "Moves," and "The Concert." . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 3: "Apollo," "Circus Polka," "Red Angels," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Quatre," and "Vienna Waltzes." . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 8: "Interplay," "Red Angels," "Brandenburg," and "Western Symphony." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. The season continues through March 2.)

"Altogether Different"—The final performances of the contemporary-dance festival. The programs, in every case, include a première and, in most cases, at least one seasoned work. Jan. 22-23 at 8: **POPPO AND THE GO-GO BOYS,** in "Crazy Me, Crazy You." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8 and Jan. 25 at 2: **SARA PEARSON/PATRIK WIDRIG & CO.,** in "Muezzin," "Ordinary Festivals," "Journal Entries," and "Dr. Pearson's Guide to Loss and Fear." . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8 and Jan. 26 at 2: **NETA PULVERMACHER & DANCERS,** in "To Bite an Orange with Its Peel," "A Song," and "Zaz." As a choreographer, Pulvermacher often adds by subtraction; in "A Song," for example, nobody sings. "It's based on a Tlingit lyric," she explains, "a story about mosquitoes and boats." During a stay in Anchorage, she worked with one of the last speakers of a local dialect: the choreographer would watch the old woman's hands and follow the story, not in translation but in a transcription of the Tlingit sounds, and then she built the work from these simple movements and repetitions. "Say the word 'boat' is repeated in the story. It creates a very interesting phrasing, definitely not 1-2-3-4, 2-2-3-4." By the time of the performance, she was ready to eliminate the words, an act she likens to the disappearance of the language itself. "I removed the text, and it became so clear: what was left was the traces of the language." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

Roxane D'Orleans Juste—This principal dancer from the José Limón troupe is a choreographer's dream: even her hair moves with extravagant strength. Her latest solo program reflects her versatility: two contemporary works ("Flood," by Susanne Linke, and "O'Neero," by Donald McKayle), two reconstructions ("Brahms Waltzes," an Isadora Duncan solo from 1913, and "Chaconne," Limón's version of the Latin-American dance, which the choreographer first performed in 1942), and a finale of her own devising, "Between Flesh and Heaven." (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. Jan. 23-24 at 9 and Jan. 25-26 at 8.)

CAITLIN COBB and **SUSAN OSBERG**—The choreographers share a program and a preoccupation with myth and dreams, but not the stage: Cobb dances alone in "White Bird/Black Song"; Osberg follows, with an eight-member cast, in "Echo." (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 23-26 at 8:30.)

"PASSING BACK THROUGH THE HEART"—The well-travelled collaborator and choreographer Allyson Green gathers friends for a program in two parts, a sort of "Allyson Bright and Dark." In the shadowy portion, she joins forces with Liz Carpenter, Hetty King, and Kimberley Bartosik. The capering carnival half features Heidi Latsky and Julie Carr, among others. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 23-25 at 8 and Jan. 26 at 3.)

MAZOWSZE—The ninety Polish folk dancers perform traditional dances that company sources outside Warsaw describe as "full of fantasy and truculence." In one of the program's twenty-five songs, "I Would Marry an Old Man," a girl complains of the boredom of single life; her mother tells her that in marriage a woman must work until she tears her skin. In another, "Swiniorz," a country lass receives a mash note from a swineherd who claims that his love for her is as great as his love for his pigs. (Whitman Hall, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. Jan. 26 at 2.)

"RED LIGHT ROOSTERS"—George Stamos offers a view of hustler-client transactions from the service provider's perspective, mingling autobiography with videotaped commentary from Quentin Crisp on love, sex, money, etc. The evening begins with the choreographer's solo "Bite." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 23-26 at 8:30.)

"NOCTURNE"—Ebisu Torii and Mutsuko Tanaka, the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers of Butoh, incorporate improvisational passages into the form's slow oneiric movements. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 752-3015. Jan. 24-25 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

"YOU GOTTA HAVE FRIENDS"—A benefit concert that includes performances by Celine Dion, Reba McEntire, Luther Vandross, Kevin Sharp, and the Boys Choir of Harlem. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 22 at 7:30.)

"GERSHWIN: A PORTRAIT IN JAZZ"—The work of George and Ira Gershwin makes up a good part of the mainstream jazz repertoire. Highlighting this celebration of their brilliance will be performances of Gil Evans's classic arrangements from "Porgy and Bess," as well as new charts from Michael Abene and two masters of the orchestral form: Frank Foster and Jimmy Heath. Singer Nneena Freelon and pianist Michel Camilo are also performing. (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

TORI AMOS—One of pop's more eccentric performers, this classically trained piano prodigy turned spandex vixen débuted in 1991 with "Little Earthquakes," a critically acclaimed mixture of baroque keyboard work and oozing sexuality—not bad for a minister's daughter. On the cover of her most recent record, "Boys for Pele" (dedicated to a volcano goddess who swallows men whole), she's pictured breast-feeding a pig. Onstage, as on disk, she may be over the top, but she's rarely a bore. (The Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Jan. 23 at 8.)

SMASHING PUMPKINS—On their meticulously crafted, mammoth double album, "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness," these Chicago misfits create a dense, sprawling sound that draws on rock and roll's richest mineral deposits, with trace elements of Pink Floyd, Cheap Trick, and Led Zeppelin, and a lode of New Wave. Some people seem to think that this monster of a record is one of the biggest pop efforts of the nineties; the only thing that's bigger is the ego of chief Pumpkinhead Billy Corgan. (Nassau Coliseum, 516-794-9300. Jan. 24 at 7:30.)

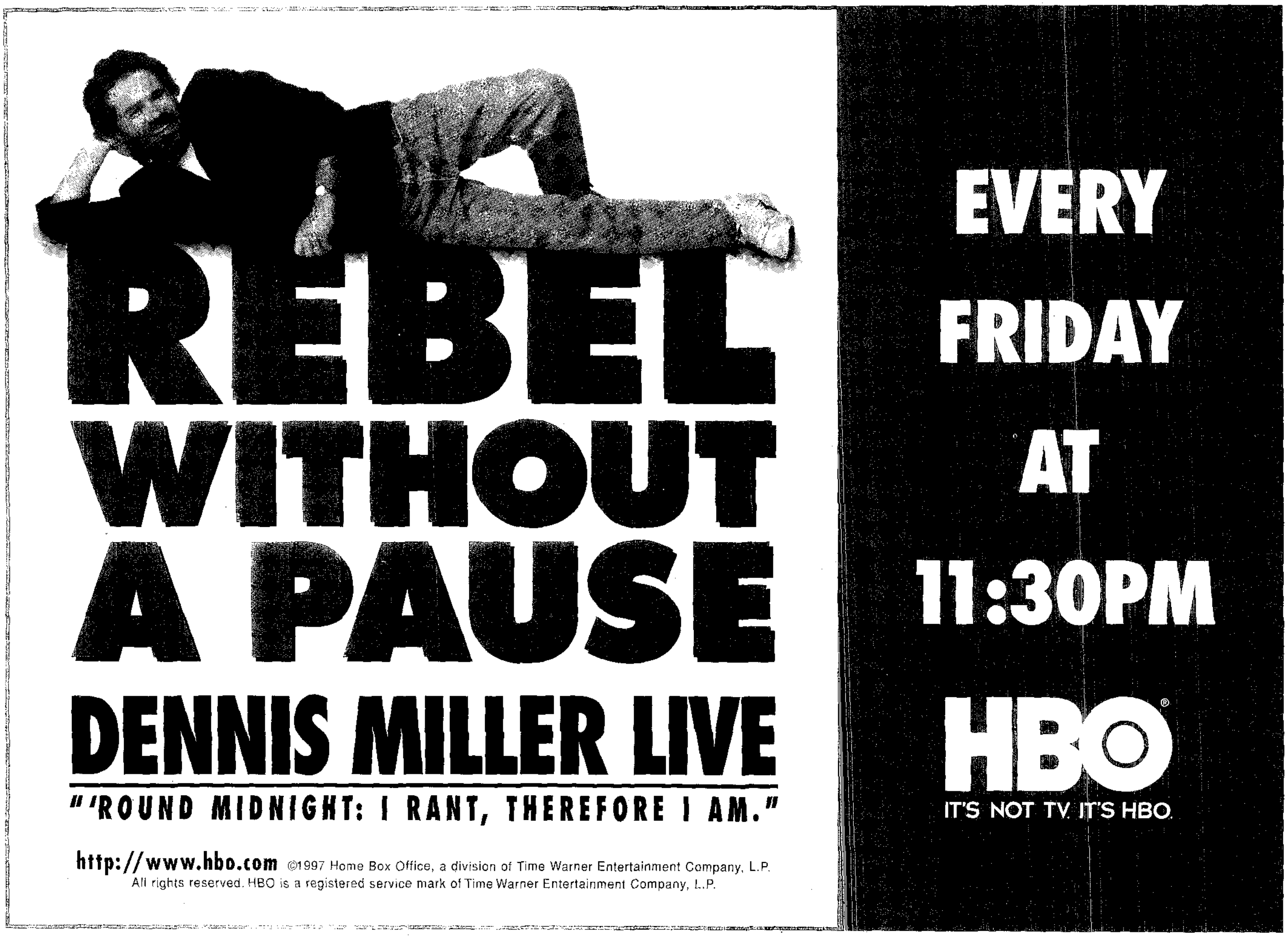
LAGNI SUSSU—Music from West Africa, performed by a new ensemble that includes *balafon* (xylophone) player Naby Coyah Camara and *kora* (harp flute) player Keba Bobo Cissoko. (Washington Square Church, 134 W. 4th St. For information, call 545-7536. Jan. 24 at 8.)

CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ BAND—Had the Gershwin brothers written nothing more than "I Got Rhythm"—the basis for countless tunes rooted in its chord progressions—the jazz world would still owe them big-time; fortunately, they wrote plenty more. In this family concert, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band will explore the nature of jazz through the prism of the team's imperishable contributions. (247-7800. Jan. 25 at 2.)

VERVE JAZZFEST—Verve Records throws an old-fashioned jazz concert to flaunt its star power. The subtle stylist and comeback king Joe Henderson may be everyone's favorite tenor saxophonist, but his too eager trio isn't always the best forum for his delicious tone and careful phrasing. Charlie Haden's Quartet West indulges the great bassist's taste for postwar bop and Hollywood-era sentiment. The Kansas City All-Star Band may have been the best thing about Robert Altman's latest film. In this ad-hoc aggregation, aggressive players of all generations, including James Carter, Don Byron, David (Fathead) Newman, Nicholas Payton, and Christian McBride, get to make believe they're inventing swing. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Jan. 25 at 8.)

LOS PLENEROS DE LA 21—The song-dance-and-drum ensemble from Puerto Rico. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Jan. 25 at 8.)

JAZZ AT MERKIN HALL—You want jazz piano? You got it. Harold Mabern and Mulgrew Miller represent the Memphis strain, Geoff Keezer represents the younger giants, and Kenny Barron represents perfection. (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 27 at 8.)



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ROCK, ETC.

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Jan. 23: Now in his seventies, flat-picking guitar master **Doc Watson** is still the same avatar of American roots music that he was when folklorist Ralph Rinzler discovered him back in 1960. His most recent album, "Docabilly," found him breezing through songs by Elvis, Johnny Cash, and the Everly Brothers. Now that Bill Monroe is gone, you'd be hard pressed to find someone more deserving of his own Smithsonian exhibit. With the excellent singer-songwriter **Richard Buckner.** Jan. 24-25: **Rockapella.**

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Jan. 23: From Philly, something called the **All-Fellas Band**—a hometown project of G. Love (of Special Sauce) and cohorts Kat Man, Johnny V., and Smiles. With **Cardinal Woolsey** and **Alma.** Jan. 25: Top-flight alternative rock with **Antietam** and **Run On.** Jimi Hendrix Experience bass player **Noel Redding** brings some friends in on Jan. 27.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Jan. 24-25: The **Holmes Brothers.** No meteoric rags-to-riches story here: after more than twenty-five years in the business, this impossibly great band finally made its first album in 1989. The Holmes Brothers have it all—blues, soul, gospel, R. & B., and country, along with a poise that lends the mix an authority that younger, looser groups can't touch.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Jan. 24: **Lisa J. Cornelio** and **Lars Vegas.** Jan. 25: **Lazy Boy.** This New York trio makes guitar-driven, noirish instrumental music that recalls the work of Chris Isaak (minus the vocals, of course) and of Angelo Badalamenti (particularly for David Lynch's creepy movie "Wild at Heart"). The guitar drips with secret-agent echo, the bass murmurs and pleads like a broken heart, and the snare drum cracks with Spartan authority—an evocative soundtrack for your own private movie. With the dark, zoot-suited pop of **Congo Norvell** (and a set of jazz standards featuring members of both bands). The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Jan. 24: Long-time alternative-rock dark princes the **Swans** make their final appearance, which is a tragedy for fans of hypnotic, droning guitar music. Don't miss the opening act, **Low,** a Duluth trio that specializes in high-impact emotion without histrionics (a guitar solo is usually just a methodically strummed single note). On its fine new disk, "The Curtain Hits the Cast," the minimalist approach speaks volumes—listening to Low makes you feel drugged. Jan. 25: Low-riding, mean-and-ugly grunge with the **Jesus Lizard.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—Jan. 25: **Sleepy La Beef** is an Arkansas boy who is reputed to know six thousand songs; his sets are always full of surprises. Jan. 26: **Marky Ramone,** the drummer from the band of the same famous last name, embarks on a solo career.

The Mavericks, at Tramps.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Jan. 22: Transplanted British guitarist **Francis Dunnery** and the dynamic singer-songwriter **Willie Nile.** Jan. 24: Country-flavored rock with **Go to Blazes.** Jan. 25: The quirky, jazz-inflected pop of **Elysian Fields.** Jan. 26: **Chavez,** a kind of indie-rock supergroup, featuring former members of Live Skull and Bullet LaVolta. "Gone Glimmering," the band's very cool début on the very cool Matador Records, was one of the gems of 1995, but Chavez is best seen live—its canny, artful intensity provides arena-size bliss. The band's new record is called "Ride the Fader." Jan. 27: **Pull My Daisy.**

Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—Jan. 28: **Marianne Faithfull.** Her voice—a knowing mix of gravel, steel, and honey—suggests how much she has gone through. Her autobiography, published in 1995, gives the details: British pop stardom, drug addiction, and emotional collapse, followed by a spectacularly dignified return. Last year, the Courtney Love of her generation released "A Secret Life," which adds a fine new chapter to her story, thanks to Angelo Badalamenti's generous orchestration and Faithfull's brutally confessional lyrics.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Jan. 22: One of the few country bands with a fervent rock-and-roll following, the **Mavericks** make elegant prairie pop that owes more to the crisp harmonies of the Everly Brothers than to the glitz of contemporary Nashville. They like to push the boundaries, and in the course of a show they can flit from lounge numbers to Springsteen to Grand Ole Opry with almost comic versatility.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Guitarist and vocalist **John Pizzarelli's** impudent goofiness brings a fresh breeze to the stuffy old Oak Room this month. Jan. 27: **Alex Donner,** in his cabaret show "New York, My Home Town." Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Jan. 22: **Chico Hamilton** and **Euphoria.** Jan. 23-25: **Benny Waters's Ninety-fifth-Birthday Bash.** Waters predates jazz itself. That this saxman can still conjure up the lusty pleasures of the swing era is a combined triumph of art and endurance. His birthday band mixes excellent younger players like keyboardist Mike LeDonne and guitarist Howard Alden with such veterans as bassist Earl May and drummer Eddie Locke; here's hoping they can keep up with the old man. Jan. 26: **Manny Duran's** Latin Jazz Group. Jan. 27: How **Toshiko Akiyoshi** has kept her big band going strong for thirty-plus years is anybody's guess. A showcase for its leader's distinctively modernist compositions, arrangements, and fluid bop piano, the orchestra also has a whirlwind of a soloist in Akiyoshi's husband, tenorist and flutist **Lew Tabackin.** Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through Jan. 26: The **Clark Terry** quintet and the **Harry (Sweets) Edison** Jazz All Stars. Terry and Edison, two of the truly great mainstream trumpeters, couldn't be more different as players. Terry is garrulous and ebullient, sometimes alternating trumpet and flugelhorn in a single number to accommodate his verbosity. Edison is downright stingy with his notes, milking the expressive potential in each one dry before eking out another. That both men swing their tails off is one of the miraculous riddles of jazz. Starting Jan. 28: The **Milt Jackson** quartet and the **James Moody** quartet. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, for a two-month stint, the amazing **Eartha Kitt.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **Peter Mintun** is in charge. A genuine throwback to a gentler time, this elegant performer specializes in curios from the twenties and thirties. Agreeable and reassuring without being over-gracious, he's sort of a curio himself.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Through Jan. 24: The **Han Bennink Duet Concerts.** On the 22nd, the madcap Dutch percussionist first pairs off with trumpeter **Dave Douglas** ("Serpentine," their recently released duet, has already whetted our appetite), and then goes head to head with Sonic Youth guitarist **Lee Ranaldo.** The 23rd finds Bennink facing the eclectic pianist **Anthony Coleman** and the blustery trombone virtuoso **Ray Anderson.** Avant pianist **Matthew Shipp** gets to converse with him on the 24th. Jan. 26: "The Composer Series" (see Classical Music). Jan. 28 is Glasgow-rock night, with lapsed idols **Teenage Fanclub** and adolescents on the verge **Bis** (whose members are named Manda Rin, Sci-Fi Steven, and John Disco).

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. Now at bat: **Tony Danza.**

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A convivial and crowded jazz club where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through Jan. 26: The **John Hicks** trio (a quintet some nights). Intense, inventive, and garrulous, pianist Hicks combines the harmonic daring and aggressive stance of McCoy Tyner with the romantic fluency of Roland Hanna—not a bad mix. Starting Jan. 28: The **Stanley Cowell** quartet. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 26: The **Wycliffe Gordon and Ronald Westray** quintet. Trombones reign in Gordon and Westray's group, as do Southern sweetness, modern harmonies, and modal grooves. Rounding out the sound are pianist **Cyrus Chestnut,** bassist **Steve Kirby,** and drummer **Alvester Garnett.** Starting Jan. 28: The **Brad Mehldau** trio makes its Vanguard début. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** still holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—Jan. 22-25: The **Chris Potter** quartet. Potter is no longer merely promising—he's a monster player. A tenorist whose lean melodicism can remind you of Joe Henderson at his craftiest, he employs his considerable technique in the service of music rather than spectacle.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—The Costume Institute's much heralded "Christian Dior" blockbuster displays more than eighty opulent items from the decade beginning in 1947, when the designer first presented his influential New Look. Fifty years later, that silhouette's most startling aspect is the pelvis (padded into a breadbox shape), its most blissful achievement the surface simplicity of dresses elaborately handcrafted and structured within. Standouts include the "Aladin," a 1947 champagne-colored satin dinner dress that looks like a giant scarf casually draped; the 1949 "Black Swan" velvet-and-satin strapless ball gown, a swaggering archetype of glamour; a theatrical, vestmentlike pink evening coat made for Eva Perón in 1951; and a pair of truly to-die-for blue satin-and-lace sequin-embroidered evening boots by Roger Vivier, from 1957. Through March 23. . . . ¶ "Late Klee" showcases twenty seldom-seen drawings, paintings, and watercolors from 1925 to 1940, the last fifteen years of the artist's life, during which he was discredited by the Nazis, fired from his teaching job in Düsseldorf, and forced to return to his native Switzerland. The "Stricken City," of 1936, and the porcine "Angel Applicant," of 1939, are as grim as you might expect, but most of these works are not: uncharacteristically loose, portentously bold, and larger than usual, many of them have the artist's typical sweetness, whimsy, and exuberance. Through April 13. . . . ¶ "The Gods of War: Sacred Imagery and the Decoration of Arms and Armor," a thought-provoking installation of sixty-five beautiful objects of warfare. Through November. . . . ¶ The cynosure of a large exhibition surveying the career of the Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) must certainly be the restored Ladies' Luncheon Room from Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tea Rooms, in Glasgow. Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Denise Marika's installation, "More Weight," features a video loop of nude figures projected onto a large rectangular metallic structure with layers of pink felt in the center. Through Jan. 26. . . . ¶ "New Photography 12" features work by Richard Billingham, Thomas Demand, Osamu Kanemura, Sophie Ristelhueber, Georgina Starr, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Rrose Is a Rrose Is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography." Staged portraits and self-portraits by artists from Man Ray to Cindy Sherman. Through April 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"The Messenger" and "The Crossing," two video installations by Bill Viola. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Making Mischief," an excellent exhibition chronicling the Dada invasion of New York, from the Great War through the early twenties. Chief among its attractions is a significant selection of pieces by Marcel Duchamp, including a painstaking reconstruction of his masterpiece "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even." As often happens at the Whitney, some American artists have been shoehorned into an exhibit they have no business in. Still, the material is fascinating and very well presented. Louise and Walter Arensberg's salon has been reconstructed with a full-size photographic mural and many of the original paintings (by Cézanne, Duchamp, Braque, and others) hanging in their proper places. Through Feb. 23. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The renovated Hall of Vertebrate Origins is open, its dropped ceiling removed to reveal Calvert Vaux's skylit design. All the better to see the dunkleosteus, a sixteen-foot-long hanging model of an armored fish, based on the four-foot-long fossil of its head, with self-sharpening jawbones. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—The museum's extensive Chinese collection has handsome new quarters in which a careful, lucid presentation offers a broad look at the art of the Middle Kingdom, from Neolithic stone carvings to blue-and-white ceramics of the late Ch'ing dynasty. . . . ¶ "Mine," Rona Pondick's site-specific work for the Grand Lobby, continues to welcome museumgoers through September. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—"Severo and the Sea Monsters" includes two bronzes from the workshop of the sixteenth-century Ravenna master, who specialized in grotesques of this kind. One, a youthful-looking Neptune triumphing over his scaly foe, is a familiar friend from the permanent collection. The other is a signed recent acquisition, an exquisitely executed inkwell in the form of a creature whose sinuous, graceful body, long, froggy fingers, and expressively wistful face combine in humorous pathos; its discovery, in 1935, gave scholars evidence that prompted a rash of reattributions. The exhibit also includes informative materials relating to classical and medieval monsters; Mantegna's gorgeous "Battle of the Sea Gods," an engraving on loan from the Met; and a reproduction of a fanciful Dutch seventeenth-century color map of Iceland, complete with menacing denizens of the deep. Through March 9. . . . ¶ "Old Master Drawings from the Ratjen Foundation" offers a feast of sixty works from the collection of Wolfgang Ratjen, of Liechtenstein, most of them from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and nearly all of them stunning. A powerful "Flaying of Mar-

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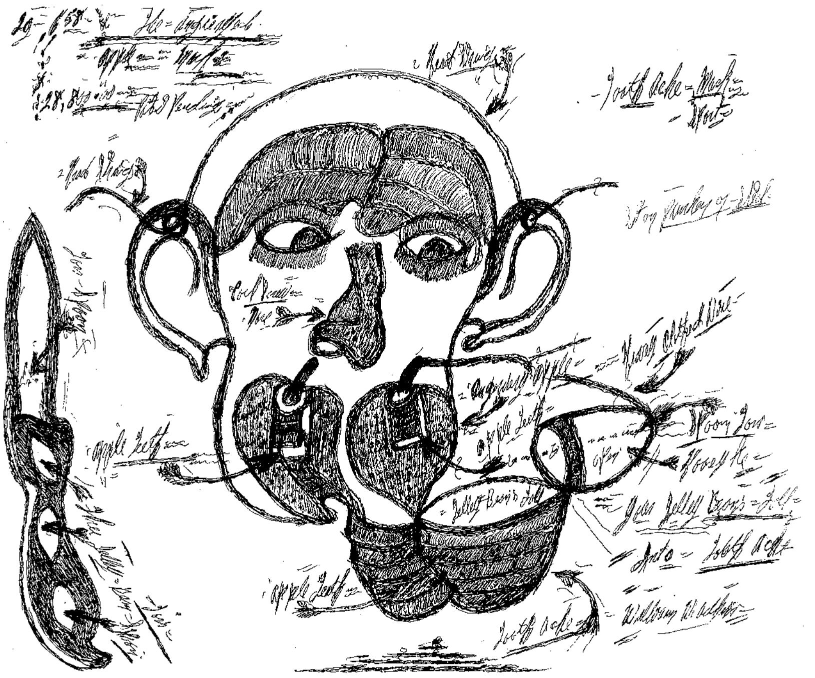
syas," by Paolo Farinati, a playfully bravura "'Giovedi Grasso' Festival on the Piazetta," by Canaletto, and a lovingly accurate, light-filled "View Over the Tiber, Onto St. Peter's and the Castel Sant'Angelo," by Giuseppe Zocchi, are especially notable. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—"William Morris: The Collector as Creator." More than a hundred objects, most of them books (including the ravishingly illuminated fourteenth-century English "Windmill Psalter"—along with a thousand-pound check to its seller—and an elegant seventeenth-century herbal), reflect the great Victorian aesthete's wide-ranging interests and show some of the ways he transformed these sources in his own work. We also learn about his literary tastes: Scott, Keats, Dickens, and, more surprisingly, Joel Chandler Harris (Brer Rabbit is depicted in one of his textiles). Exhibits of books can be frustrating, since glass barriers prevent you from actually reading them, but this show provides considerate descriptions of, and sometimes excerpts from, their contents, along with often endearing facts about such matters as the "agonies of confusion of the brain" which the eminent socialist endured when reading Karl Marx and the vanity that prevented him from being photographed in his eyeglasses (also exhibited, along with their case). Through Feb. 15. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)



"Angrieyed Apple Mask," a self-portrait by the outsider artist William W. Adkins (Ricco/Maresca). For related outsider-art events, see the listing below.

Museo del Barrio, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (831-7272)—"Santos: Sculptures Between Heaven and Earth," a modest but excellent exhibition of Caribbean devotional figures, which will be on permanent display. The show includes some fifty Puerto Rican *santos*—small statues of Jesus, the Virgin, the Magi, and various saints—mostly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many were intended for little altars in kitchens or bedrooms; hence, despite the traditional iconography, they speak most powerfully of local, often humble circumstances. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (534-1672)—"New York Toy Stories" is a thoroughly delightful collection of some three hundred playthings, both homemade and commercially produced, from the past two centuries. In keeping with the urban emphasis, almost all are indoor toys. Eloise, that quintessentially overprivileged New York child, has a case to herself. One doll has the tiniest kitchen accessories imaginable; another, made of a clothespin and a napkin, reminds us that anything, viewed in a playful spirit, can be a toy. There are rocking horses and roller skates, carved sheep and lead soldiers, spectacular teething rings and rattles, board games, antique building blocks, handcrafted slingshots and shooters, familiar friends like the yo-yo and the Slinky, and fascinating discoveries like the phrenakistascopes (pinwheel-like gadgets with little slits to look through at animated scenes). Allow plenty of time, even if you're not taking kids. Through April 27. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (369-4880)—"Theodore Clement Steele: An American Master of Light." After returning from his apprenticeship in Germany in 1885, Steele, the Indiana-born landscape painter, lightened up—literally. This exhibit chronicles the transformation from his fuliginous Sturm-und-Drang period to a brighter and looser Hoosier Impressionism. Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—Part II of "The Hand of the Poet" presents original manuscripts by the likes of Cummings, Moore, Merrill, Auden, Bishop, Lowell, Moss, Nabokov, and Sexton. Through Feb. 15. (Berg Collection. Closed Mondays.) . . . ¶ "Artful Interiors: Rooms with a View" explores, through architectural books and design guides, the history of interior design from 1750 to 1950. Through March 29. (Salomon Room.) (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

OUTSIDER ART

In conjunction with the annual **OUTSIDER ART FAIR,** organized by Sanford L. Smith (Puck Building, Houston and Lafayette Sts.; Jan. 24-26, with a preview on Jan. 23; for information, call 777-5218), museums and galleries around the city are offering related exhibitions and events. On Saturday, the Schomburg Center opens **"BEARING WITNESS,"** highlighting works by self-taught African-American artists from the South. (Malcolm X Blvd. at 135th St. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 5. 491-2265. Through March 29.) . . . ¶ Complementing its exhibition **"HENRY DARGER: THE UNREALITY OF BEING"** (through April 27), the Museum of American Folk Art conducts a series of lectures and discussions about Darger (see Above and Beyond) and other folk artists. (Columbus Ave. at 65th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30. For symposium reservations, call 977-7170.) . . . ¶ Galleries uptown and downtown call in their outsider artists: Ricco/Maresca presents **WILLIAM W. ADKINS** (see Galleries—Downtown); Hirschl & Adler Modern spotlights **BILL TRAYLOR** (21 E. 70th St.; 535-8810; through March 8); and, in **"EXPRESSIONISM AND THE ART OF GUGGING,"** the Galerie St. Etienne contrasts the work of its stable of artists with work from the House of Artists at the Lower Austrian Psychiatric Hospital in Gugging (24 W. 57th St.; 245-6734; through March 15).

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, downtown and uptown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

William W. Adkins—Patent designs, in ballpoint pen on poster board, by an inventor who lives in a shack and believes he is working for the military. The black-and-white drawings—plans for such quixotic gizmos as a "Hot Burning Sand Cuff" and a "Bevelled Rasp Sack"—are bold, obsessive, and neatly annotated with indecipherable specifications. The gallery's exhibition guide contains the artist's explanations ("This set-up is a corn gamble. You play out the water bucket with corn and sponges. You win if your honk sponge matches the size of your vehicle horn"), his endearingly absurd price list (from seventy-eight hundred to forty-four billion dollars), and other nobly crackpot touches that do not appear to be ironic. Through Feb. 1. (Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071.)

Alan Belcher—"Friends," soft sculptures of acrylic plush and polyester fibrefill, the raw materials of stuffed animals. They are largely abstract, although representational elements (fried eggs, soccer balls, brains) frequently intrude. There is no mistaking the influences of Claes Oldenburg and, more recently, Mike Kelly, yet these cuddly mutants don't seem excessively derivative. Through Feb. 8. (Shainman, 560 Broadway. 966-3866.)

Stan Douglas—Two early installations by the Canadian artist: "Onomatopoeia" (1985-86), which incorporates a working player piano, and "Deux Devises" (1983), which sets spare slide projections against recorded music. Like the artist's subsequent work, they employ conceptually derived strategies suffused with quasi-romantic melancholy; this poeticizing vein represents an important aspect in the recent development of conceptualism. The show also includes some altogether drier photo/text pieces. Through Jan. 25. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-96)—"'Untitled' (Beginning)" (1994), an installation by the late Cuban-born artist consisting of a row of floor-to-ceiling strands of colored plastic beads partitioning the gallery. The work has a high degree of shimmer, suggesting the formalist painting of the sixties; at the same time, the cultural references (retro seventies design, Vegas glamour) lead away from such high-abstraction precursors. And the fact that you can simply walk through endows the work with further layers of meaning, experiential and process-oriented. Through Jan. 25. (Rosen, 130 Prince St. 941-0203.)

Liisa Roberts—"Trap Door," a sculptural installation incorporating four silent 16-mm. projections. The one on the largest screen is projected conventionally, and your shadow intrudes as you approach it. The other three film loops are back-projected onto a triangle of screens. Roberts juxtaposes images of women, hands, and isolated textual elements ("me," "you," "them," etc.). Interesting, but extremely arty. Through Feb. 4. (Lehman Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

SHORT LIST—**MARINA ABRAMOVIC,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through Feb. 22. . . . **CHARLES ARNOLDI,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. 925-3500. Through Jan. 25. . . . **BARRY X BALL,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through Feb. 8. . . . **BRIDGET BUSUTIL,** Wickiser, 568 Broadway. 941-1817. Through Jan. 23. . . . **NANCY CHUNN,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Feb. 15. . . . **ELLEN HARVEY,** Limbo Café, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. 477-5271. Through Feb. 3. . . . **ROBERT MORRIS,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. Through Feb. 8. . . . **NABIL NAHAS,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through Feb. 15. . . . **CLAES OLDENBURG,** Inglett, 100 Wooster St. 343-0573. Through Feb. 22. . . . **SHERYL RUBINSTEIN,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through Feb. 8. . . . **ROBERT SMITHSON** and **MASSIMO ANTONACI,** Weber, 142 Greene St. 966-6115. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **JOAN WHEELER,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. 966-2625.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SHORT LIST—**STEPHEN DI CILLO** and **JULIE LANGSAM,** Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Both shows through Jan. 26. . . . **JEFF NELSON,** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Opens at noon; through Feb. 2.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

GORDON COOK (1927-85)—Forty-one small-scale, pleasingly surrealistic works in various mediums, most of them from the last year of the artist's life. Nearly all are "stick figures"—human beings represented as limbs and (minimal) heads of grained wood, precisely rendered—but many manage, through posture or gesture, to suggest an individual personality. Through Feb. 1. (Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122.)

DAVID DEWEY—Seventeen watercolors of buildings in Maine. The work is full of rhythm and off-center compositions that often redeem what would otherwise be mere prettiness. Through Jan. 30. (Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907.)

MARK FRANCIS—Eight large, strikingly original images, chiefly based on microphotographs of cells and chromosomes, by a young Irish-born and London-based artist; this is his first solo New York show. The austere, glowing beauty of the paintings, all done last year—mostly in variously shaded blacks on variously shaded whites—presents a decidedly seductive view of biological process. Through Feb. 22. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929.)

LEON POLK SMITH (1906-96)—Though all sixteen of the large, bold, spare geometric paintings in this show are from the present decade, some look a little dated now, especially the Op-art-like black-on-gray works segregated in a small room off the main gallery. Yet there is a freshness to the daring simplicity of several of the others, especially three bright tondos called "Events" (in orange, blue, and green) and "Big Space–Black Line," a bottom-heavy chevron in black on a white canvas. The artist died last month, at the age of ninety. Through Feb. 8. (McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. 319-1996. Open Mondays.)

JIMMY WRIGHT / JACK BUSH (1909-77)—Sixteen outscale paintings and pastels of flowers which look like what Van Gogh might have done on acid. In some of them, the writhing, withered petal forms, usually unnaturally bright (e.g., vermillion) and often set against phosphorescent backgrounds, resemble crackling flames; in others, sunflower centers stare out like nightmare eyeballs. An enormous diptych (60 x 144 inches) of fall flowers in baskets, on the other hand, would be simply lovely if it weren't for its mutant size. The artist has said that in painting flowers "part of the challenge is not getting sentimental"; he has certainly risen to it. / "The Decade of Discovery 1952-1962" presents eight works, all but two in oil, from the years when the Canadian artist first began exploring ideas from the New York School; most are simple shingle-like patches of colors on white grounds. One watercolor, "Late Summer #2" (1961), offers a delicately pleasing play of curved and straight-edged shapes. Both shows through Feb. 1. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

SHORT LIST—**CHESTER ARNOLD,** Adams, 41 W. 57th St. 644-5665. Through Jan. 31. . . . **GARY BROTMEYER,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through March 1. . . . **DAN FLAVIN** and **KAZIMIR MALEVICH,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **YVONNE JACQUETTE** and **LOUIS LOZOWICK,** Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **PHILIP SHERROD,** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 988-6870. Through Jan. 31. . . . **PATTI SMITH,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through Feb. 8. . . . **NIELE TORONI,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Feb. 15.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S—Jan. 22-23: Arcade sales (for the budget-conscious) of decorative arts and furniture, such as a Chippendale desk estimated to sell for only three thousand to five thousand dollars. . . . ¶ Jan. 24-25: The estate of the late Sotheby's auctioneer Robert Woolley, whose eclectic personal tastes included Russian objets d'art. . . . ¶ Jan. 25: Fine English furniture, mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S—Jan. 24 at 10 A.M.: Chinese export porcelain. . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 2: English furniture and decorative art. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

PHILLIPS—An auction of American and modern paintings and prints, including Whistler's watercolor "Rosy Silver–The Pink Porch," which has not been displayed in public since 1889. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. Jan. 28 at 2.)

MORELL AND CO.—The wine purveyor sponsors an auction that includes bottles from outstanding producers and vintages. (Union League Club, 38 E. 37th St. For information, call 307-4200. Jan. 25 at 8:30 A.M.)

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The Weizmann Institute, founded in 1934, is a community of 2,400 scientists, engineers and scientists-in-training engaged in a full agenda of 850 research projects ranging from basic medical research in cancer, AIDS, neurosciences and children's diseases to chemistry, physics, agriculture, computer science and the environment.

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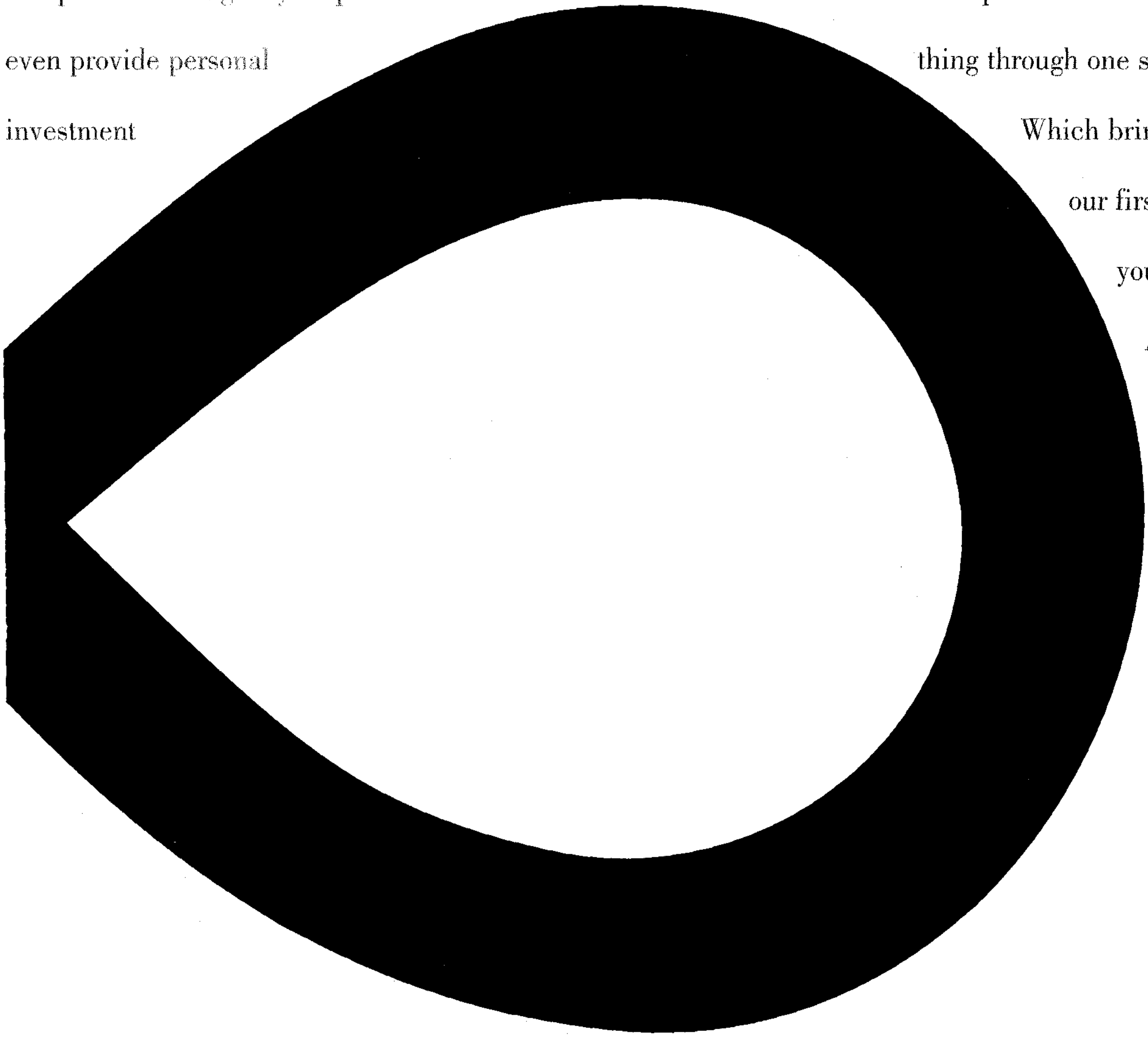

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WINTER ANTIQUES SHOW—This popular annual event continues through Jan. 26. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. For information, call 718-292-7392.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

RUDY BURCKHARDT—A selection of vintage New York City views by the eighty-two-year-old photographer and painter. Through Feb. 8. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

BRUCE DAVIDSON—"American Photographs," a survey of the artist's career, including pictures of a Brooklyn gang, residents of Spanish Harlem, subway riders, civil-rights demonstrators, and Central Park. Through Feb. 22. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300.)

YASUHIRO ISHIMOTO—Thirty black-and-white photographs made in Chicago between 1950 and 1961. The subjects include children with masks, cars, bathers, and street scenes. In the small gallery there is a complementary selection of works by Ishimoto's Chicago teachers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. Both shows through Feb. 22. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220.)

DAVID LEVINTHAL—The first large survey of the artist's series of inanimate figures in elaborate dioramas: cowboys, storm troopers, bathing beauties, Japanese-made sex-and-bondage figurines, blackface icons. Through March 21. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.... ¶ A complementary show of the "Blackface" series opens Jan. 23 at Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.)

ANDREW MOORE—Recent large color prints of Times Square theatre interiors. Through Feb. 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

JEANNE MOUTOUSSAMY-ASHE—Eloquent as they are, the photographer's understated, often melancholy portraits from the seventies and eighties—Miss Mary presiding in her South Carolina kitchen, a pensive young girl gazing out a screen door—don't prepare you for the devastation of this show's final pictures: "Daddy and Me" (1991), a silhouetted Arthur Ashe (the photographer's husband) playing with his daughter, and "Father and Daughter" (1993), taken at the tennis player's funeral. Through Jan. 25. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

HERB RITTS—A survey of the fashion photographer's portraits, glamour work, and nudes. Through Feb. 22. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.)

WALTER ROSENBLUM—Vintage New York City and Second World War photographs. Through March 1. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223.)

"ZEITGEIST BECOMES FORM: GERMAN FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY, 1945-1995"—Close to two hundred works by thirty-nine photographers, including Regina Relang, Hubs Flöter, Helmut Newton, Ellen von Unwerth, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 23. (Hearn, 727-7366, and Morris Healy, 243-3753, both at 530 W. 22nd St.)

SHORT LIST—**JOHN BALDESSARI,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through Feb. 8.... **ERNST BRUNNER,** Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Spring St. 925-2035. Through Feb. 8.... **ROBERT FLYNT** and **MICHAEL VON GRAFFENRIED,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Both shows through Feb. 15.... **JOHN GRUEN,** McGrath, 20 W. 57th St. 956-3366. Through Feb. 8.... **F. C. GUNDLACH,** American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St. 941-0401. Through March 1.... **PETER LINDBERGH,** Danziger, 130 Prince St. 226-0056. Through March 1.... **DUANE MICHALS,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St. 586-0110. Through Feb. 1.... **MARTHA ROSLER,** Gorney, 100 Greene St. 966-4480. Through Feb. 22.... **DAVID STEPHENSON** and **MAXWELL MACKENZIE,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Feb. 15.... **JOEL STERNFELD** and **ROBERT FRANK,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Both shows through Feb. 22.... **BOYD WEBB,** Bonakdar, 130 Prince St. 925-8035. Through Feb. 15.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050, and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**I PURITANI,** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Stanford Olsen, Thomas Hampson, and Alastair Miles; conducted by Edoardo Müller. (Jan. 22 and Jan. 25 at 8.)... With Stuart Neill instead of Mr. Olsen. (Jan. 28 at 7:30.)... **LA BOHÈME,** with Patricia Racette, Gwynne Geyer, Marcello Giordani, and Haijing Fu; Nello Santi. (Jan. 23 at 7:30.)... **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO,** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Barbara Bonney, Dawn Upshaw, James Morris, and Michele Pertusi; Leopold Hager. (Jan. 24 and Jan. 27 at 8.)... **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and **PAGLIACCI,** with Dolora Zajick, Fabio Armiliato, and Bruno Pola in the former, and Diana Soviero, Johan Botha, and Leo Nucci in the latter; Simone Young conducts both. (Jan. 25 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

LISTENING BOOTH

"GIOVANNI GABRIELI: MUSIC FOR SAN ROCCO, 1608"—"I heard the best musicke that ever I did in all my life both in the morning and in the afternoone, so good that I would willingly goe an hundred miles a foote at any time to heare the like." So wrote the English traveller Thomas Coryat, describing the festal celebrations at Venice's Scuola Grande di San Rocco on August 16, 1608. This magnificent Deutsche Grammophon recording by Paul McCreesh and his crackerjack Gabrieli Consort & Players can't quite reproduce what Coryat experienced (being surrounded by the Scuola's fifty-odd Tintorettos would add to the splendor), but it comes close. Music lovers have long associated the compositions of Gabrieli (ca. 1554-1612) with Venice's Basilica of San Marco, where he served as organist; but at the same time he was part-time organist at San Rocco, and recent scholarship suggests that his much loved polychoral works were actually written for that institution. Expertly played period instruments, pure-toned choral singing, vibrant interpretations, and the opulent but not over-reverberant acoustics of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco ensure that McCreesh's collection will not soon be equalled. The nearly eighty minutes of music plumbs the variety of Gabrieli's achievement, from virtuosic organ intonations (precisely articulated by Timothy Roberts) through a selection of sonatas, canzonas, and motets to a breathtaking culmination: the reconstruction of a thirty-three-voiced Magnificat in which a tremendous assemblage—seven organs, each attached to its own choir of singers; six cornettos; and a dozen sackbuts—lets loose with a sound you won't soon forget.

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—Leon Kirchner is the model of the all-around musician. In the course of his long career, he has created finely etched piano performances and proved to be a capable conductor, but his more enduring contributions are in the realms of composition (though his catalogue is not extensive) and pedagogy, the latter most notably during a seventeen-year stint at Harvard. One of his pupils there in the early seventies was an already prominent undergraduate named Yo-Yo Ma; since then, Mr. Kirchner has composed several works for the cellist, of which the most recent is his Music for Cello and Orchestra, from 1992. In this concert, Mr. Ma is featured in that work (a concerto in all but name) and in Strauss's "Don Quixote" (which brings the orchestra's principal violist, Cynthia Phelps, into the spotlight as well). Britten's "Simple Symphony" (the composer's orchestral arrangement of pieces he wrote as a child) completes the program, which is conducted by Kurt Masur. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 23 and Jan. 25 at 8, Jan. 24 at 11 A.M., and Jan. 28 at 7:30.)

EOS ENSEMBLE—In this final event of a mini-festival that contrasts Baroque works with pieces by modern minimalists, Jonathan Sheffer leads his own transcriptions of movements from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," as well as two works by John Adams, "Shaker Loops" and Act III of the opera "Nixon in China." (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 22 at 8.)

VIENNA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA—Philippe Entremont conducts an all-Mozart program that comprises the D-Major Serenade (K. 239, the "Serenata Notturna"), the E-Flat-Major Piano Concerto (K. 271, with pianist Helen Huang), and the Symphony No. 41 (the "Jupiter"). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 24 at 8.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA—Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) began his composing career as an imitator of Chopin but in time developed a personal idiom that synthesized nineteen-twenties modernism, Polish folk idioms, and classical refinement. In this concert, Leon Botstein leads Szymanowski's Symphonies No. 3 (with tenor Brian Nedvin and the Dessoff Choirs) and No. 4 (featuring pianist Janina Fialkowska), as well as the composer's "Slopiewnie," for voice and orchestra (with Mr. Nedvin). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 24 at 8.)

MANHATTAN CHAMBER SINFONIA—The student orchestra performs Lawrence Widdoes's "From the Tomb of Abelard and Helouise," Mozart's Concertos for Bassoon (with Frank Morelli) and for Flute and Harp (with Michael Parloff and Sarah Bullen), and Brahms's Variations on a Theme by Haydn. Glen Barton Cortese conducts. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Jan. 24 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

FOCUS! 1997—*This year, the Juilliard School's* annual festival of twentieth-century music celebrates the hundredth birthday of the supremely imaginative musical innovator Henry Cowell (1897-1965). Most famous for systematizing the use of tone clusters (which he created by depressing masses of piano keys with the fingers, fist, or forearm, or by scoring groups of instruments to create a similar effect), *he was also a pioneer in playing what* he called "string piano" (strumming and plucking the instrument's strings) and an unswerving champion of the works of Ives and other experimenters. His life was extraordinary, too—it included a four-year stint in San Quentin on a morals conviction that was overturned when Earl Warren, then the governor of California, determined that the evidence *in the case had been trumped up.* Jan. 24 at 8: Robert Duerr leads the Juilliard Symphony in Cowell's "Synchrony," Ballad for String Orchestra, and Variations for Orchestra, plus works by Dane Rudhyar, Virgil Thomson, Alexander Mosolov, and Amadeo Roldán. (Alice Tully Hall.)... ¶ Jan. 27 at 8: Songs, piano music, and chamber-orchestra works by Cowell, Percy Grainger, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Otto Luening, and Colin McPhee. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St.)... ¶ Jan. 28 at 8: Instrumental and vocal pieces by Cowell, Ives, William Grant Still, Wallingford Riegger, John J. Becker, and Lou Harrison. (Juilliard Theatre. For information about the requisite free tickets to all festival events, call 769-7406. The festival continues through Jan. 31.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC—Violinist Lynn Chang and cellist Ronald Thomas play Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello, pianist Randall Hodgkinson assists Ms. Chang in Brahms's F-Major Sonata, and all three join for Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 23 at 7:30 and Jan. 26 at 4.)

AULOS ENSEMBLE—The period-instrument group offers concertos by Vivaldi and Alessandro Marcello; countertenor Derek Lee Ragin joins them for two Vivaldi cantatas. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Jan. 23 at 8.)

New York Philomusica Chamber Ensemble—The group offers Beethoven's C-Minor Piano Trio (Op. 1, No. 3) and Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time." (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 23 at 8.)

Eroica Trio—Performing a Vivaldi trio sonata as well as piano trios by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Paul Schoenfeld (his "Café Music"), and Dvořák (the "Dumky"). (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 24 at 8.)

"Warmer by the Stove" Festival—An annual series of performances for the ultra-curious, at the Lotus Fine Arts Center. Jan. 24 at 8: Improvisations by the Russian Dragon Band. . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8: Hal Rammel plays on such odd instruments of his own invention as the triolin (a resonating triangular box with a chair leg for a handle), the musical snath (a sort of monochord), and the aerolin ("indescribable"), while Steve Nelson-Raney hews closer to tradition with a variety of saxophones. (109 W. 27th St. 627-1076. Through Feb. 1.)

"What Is American Music?"—When asked that question, the late composer and critic Virgil Thomson responded bluntly: "The way to write American music is simple. All you have to do is be an American and then write any kind of music you wish." The 92nd Street Y feels compelled to ask it again, this time in the form of a concert title, and has invited a busload of musicians to demonstrate the variety of the nation's musical repertoire. In this concert, such diverse performers as clarinettist David Krakauer, the Yale Whiffenpoofs, pianists Dick Hyman and Cyrus Chestnut, and folk-blues singer Odetta each provide a piece of the answer: an amalgam of popular and classical styles, as evinced in music by Foster, Ives, Bernstein, and the other usual suspects. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 25 at 8.)

David Saliamonas, Makiko Hirata, and **Elena Baksht**—The three pianists share a program that comprises Beethoven's Sonatas in A-Major (Op. 101, played by Mr. Saliamonas) and E Major (Op. 109, played by Ms. Hirata) and Chopin's Fourth Ballade (with Ms. Baksht). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Jan. 26 at noon.)

New York Philharmonic Ensembles—Members of the orchestra perform Duruflé's Prelude, Recitative, and Variations; Prokofiev's Quintet (Op. 39); and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 26 at 3.)

Stephen Tharp—The organist (not to be confused with the tenor-about-town of the same name) plays works by Widor, Dupré, Vierne, and Anton van der Horst, as well as his own adaptation of Liszt's "Totentanz." (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Jan. 26 at 4.)

Joan Rodgers—In her New York début recital, the British soprano offers songs by Gounod, Wolf (his "Mörike-Lieder"), Mussorgsky ("The Nursery"), and Tchaikovsky. Pianist Malcolm Martineau assists. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 26 at 5.)

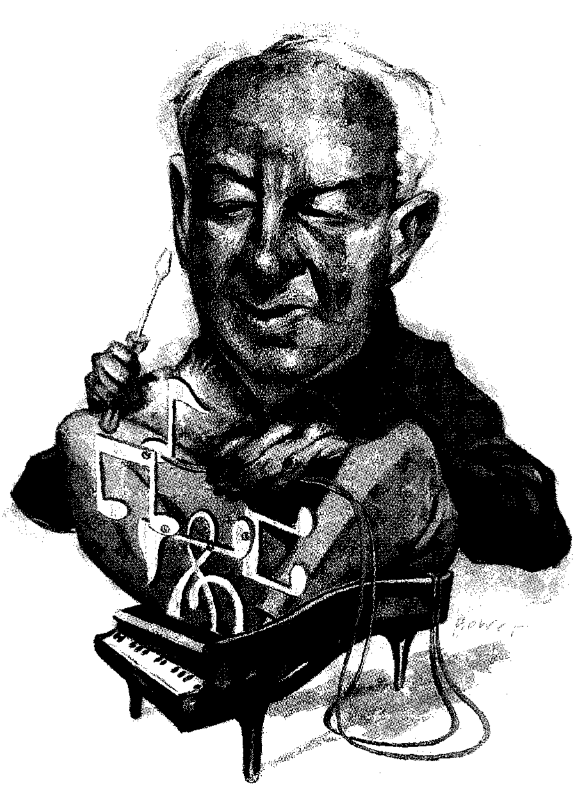
Monica Groop—Mezzo-soprano, performing songs by Schubert, Ravel, and Brahms, with pianist Rudolf Jansen. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 26 at 5.)

Yuri Kim—The pianist performs a recital that includes Beethoven's D-Minor Sonata (Op. 31, No. 2, the "Tempest"). (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Jan. 26 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

"The Composer Series"—A classical series in a decidedly unclassical venue. In this installment, pianist Steven Gosling, violinist Cornelius Dufallo, cellist David Eggar, violist Kenji Bunch, and vibraphonist Gregg Bendian perform piano trios by Ives, Shostakovich (in E Minor), and Mr. Bunch, in addition to pieces by Elliott Carter and Mr. Bendian. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 219-3006. Jan. 26 at 9.)

Liran Avni—Pianist, performing Liszt's B-Minor Sonata and a passel of preludes by Chopin. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. Jan. 27 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Prism Players—The ensemble offers Janáček's Capriccio (with pianist David Buechner), a new work by Karen P. Thomas (featuring clarinettist Jean Kopperud), and works by Schütz, Britten, and Henze. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. Jan. 27 at 8. Tickets at the door.)



Henry Cowell, celebrated at Juilliard's Focus! 1997.

Eugenia Zukerman and Anthony Newman—The flutist and the harpsichordist present a recital of French music, with readings interspersed. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571. Jan. 28 at 6.)

Pinchas Zukerman and Marc Neikrug—The violinist/violist and the pianist continue their Brahms survey with performances of the Sonatas in A Major (Op. 100, No. 2), E-Flat Major (Op. 120, No. 2), and D Minor (Op. 108, No. 3). Presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 28 at 7:30.)

David Del Tredici and Lukas Foss—A recital of music by two composers celebrating round-number birthdays (Del Tredici his sixtieth, Foss his seventy-fifth), performed by soprano Lisa Saffer, flutist Karl Kraber, clarinettist David Krakauer, percussionist James Baker, pianist Michael Boriskin, and the Borromeo String Quartet. (Great Hall, Cooper Union. Third Ave. at 7th St. Jan. 28 at 8. For information about tickets, call 996-1100.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY: A Latin-American program. (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 23 at 7:30.) . . . **KALEIDOSCOPE CONCERTS:** Chamber music by Brahms, Ravel, and others. (Landon gallery, 1926 Broadway, at 64th St. 873-7846. Jan. 23 at 8.) . . . **BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC:** Weill, Foss, and others. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Jan. 24-25 at 8.) . . . **PARTHENIA:** Viol music from Renaissance England. (Oratory Church of St. Boniface, Willoughby and Duffield Sts., Brooklyn. 718-875-2565. Jan. 25 at 8.) . . . **EARLY MUSIC AT ST. PETER'S:** Music by Purcell and Pepusch. (Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Jan. 26 at 2. Tickets at the door.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

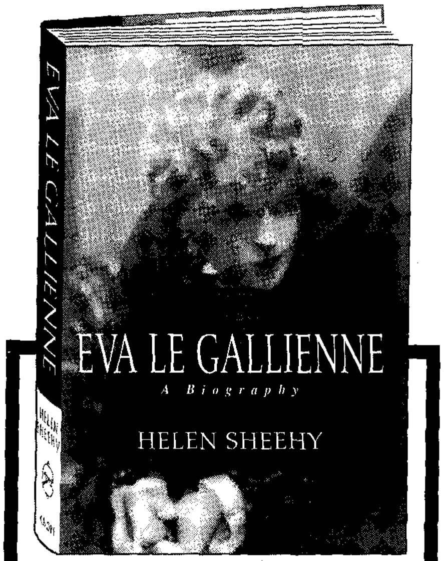
Dramatic Confrontation—In a speech last June, the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson decried the lack of funding for African-American theatre, called color-blind casting a "tool of cultural imperialists," and declared: "The time has come for black playwrights to confer with one another, to come together to meet each other face to face, to address questions of aesthetics and ways to defend ourselves from the naysayers." He also pointed a finger at Robert Brustein, the artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the drama critic of *The New Republic*. Brustein's retort appeared in *American Theatre* and set off a three-month-long debate in the pages of that magazine. Among those following the exchange was the playwright Anna Deavere Smith, who saw "something to be gained from having the two gentlemen live and in person in an actual dialogue with one another"; on Jan. 27 at 8, the two antagonists square off in a discussion she'll be moderating. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 307-7171.)

Bound for Glory—Warren Lehrer, a longtime professor of writing and design at Purchase College, is an unusual biographer: last year he produced "The Portrait Series," a quartet of books chronicling the lives of such noncelebrities as a Boston-based storyteller and a retired Long Island City dockworker. His use of the first person and his eccentric type designs and layouts have earned him a host of accolades. This Sunday he conducts a reading-cum-performance at the Knitting Factory, with help from his wife, the performance artist and writer Judith Sloan (who is currently collaborating with him on the story of a female deputy sheriff in Gulfport, Mississippi), and from double-bassist Ken Filiano. (74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. Jan. 26 at 7. Tickets at the door.)

More Readings—Jan. 23 at 7: The performance artist Carolee Schneemann reads from her collected writings. (The New Museum, 583 Broadway, between Houston and Prince Sts. 219-1222.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 7:30: National Book Award winners Andrea Barrett, Victor Martinez, and James Carroll read from the works that took home the prizes: "Ship Fever," "Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida," and "An American Requiem," respectively. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 7: Writers Francine Prose and Deborah Eisenberg read from their works. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 27 at 7: Architecture critic Karrie Jacobs, typographer Jonathan Hoefler, performance artist Aaron Landsman, and other young writers read their own short pieces about consumer culture and advertising. (Puffin Room, 435 Broome St., between Broadway and Crosby St. Tickets at the door.)

More Talks—Jan. 25 at 2:30: Following a screening of her 1994 documentary, "Bauhaus in America," the director Judith Perlman addresses the audience and answers questions about the legacy of Walter Gropius. (Donnell Library, 20 W. 53rd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 9:30 A.M.: Stephen Prokopoff discusses the Museum of American Folk Art's exhibition "Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being," which he curated, and art historian John MacGregor lends his thoughts on the troubled mind of the self-taught artist, who died in 1973. (Columbus Ave. at 65th St. For information about tickets, call 977-7170.) . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 8: "Doonesbury" creator Garry Trudeau marks twenty-seven years of Zonker, Uncle Duke, and Boopsie with a lecture titled "What a Long, Strange Strip It's Been." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

TIM BOWER



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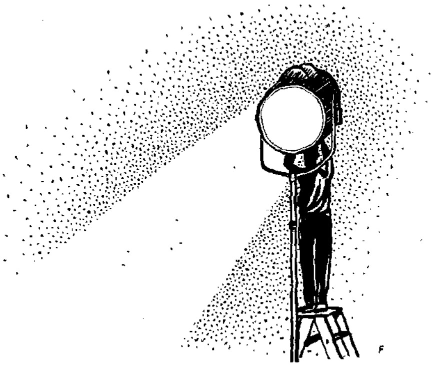
THE MOVIES



FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Angel Baby—Australian writer-director Michael Rymer's début film, about a mentally ill couple (John Lynch and Jacqueline McKenzie) who meet at group therapy and fall in love. Opening Jan. 24. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Dine on Dine—A trio of films about the artist Jim Dine, each produced and/or directed by Nancy Dine, his wife. Jan. 22-28. (Film Forum.)

Farmer & Chase—Lara Flynn Boyle comes between the father-and-son criminal team of Ben Gazzara and Todd Field, in a thriller directed by Michael Seitzman. Opening Jan. 24.

Fierce Creatures—John Cleese, Jamie Lee Curtis, Kevin Kline, and Michael Palin, the stars of "A Fish Called Wanda," reunite in a comedy about a media mogul and a small English zoo. Directed by Robert Young and Fred Schepisi. Opening Jan. 24. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, National Twin, and Waverly.)

In Love and War—During the First World War, a wounded Ernest Hemingway (Chris O'Donnell) is nursed by Agnes von Kurowsky (Sandra Bullock), who became the inspiration for Catherine Barkley in "A Farewell to Arms." Directed by Richard Attenborough. Opening Jan. 24. (Criterion Center, Gotham Cinema, and Village East Cinemas.)

Kolya—The events following an arranged marriage leave an impecunious cellist (Zdenek Sverak) without his wife but with her six-year-old son (Andrej Chalimon). Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech. Opening Jan. 24. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Prefontaine—The story of the Olympic runner Steve Prefontaine (Jared Leto), who died in 1975 at the age of twenty-four. Directed by Steve James. Opening Jan. 24. (Cinema II, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern—A documentary about an Iowa family and the land they farmed for a hundred and twenty-five years. Written and directed by Jeanne Jordan (the daughter of the last owner) and her husband, Steven Ascher. Opening Jan. 24. (Angelika Film Center.)

Zeus and Roxanne—A family adventure about the friendship between a dog and a dolphin, directed by George Miller. Starring Kathleen Quinlan and Steve Guttenberg (as human beings). Opening Jan. 24. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 24.)

Albino Alligator—In Kevin Spacey's directorial début, a trio of fleeing bank robbers (Matt Dillon, Gary Sinise, and William Fichtner) invades a bar and makes hostages of the patrons. (Angelika Film Center, Coronet, and Lincoln Square.)

Breaking the Waves—The Danish director Lars von Trier tells the sad story of a devout young Scottish woman (Emily Watson) who becomes a whore in order to save the life of her critically ill husband (Stellan Skarsgård). Von Trier gives the highbrow audience precisely what it wanted in the art-house boom years of the fifties and early sixties—nudity plus theology. The erotic-metaphysical hokum would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine religious impulse.—T.R. (11/18/96) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

La Cérémonie—A nasty look at the French bourgeoisie by Claude Chabrol. Jean-Pierre Cassel and Jacqueline Bisset hire the taciturn Sandrine Bonnaire as their new maid; she seems pleasant and efficient, but her good manners conceal dark intentions. She teams up with the local postmistress (Isabelle Huppert, trying hard to be slatternly and annoying), and together they work themselves into a fury. Chabrol's skill is not in doubt here: his camera can still creep and crawl in time with your flesh, and the final twist is a beauty. But, perhaps because the film is adapted from a Ruth Rendell novel, it's surprisingly weak on motive and continuity; there are times when you can neither follow it nor believe it, and the entire cast looks haunted and repressed. Where is the wicked, cool Chabrol of yesteryear? In French.—A.L. (1/20/97) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

The Crucible—Nicholas Hytner's florid, hyperbolic film of Arthur Miller's 1953 drama, about the Salem witchcraft trials, reveals the play as a characteristic product of its time—not so much in its anti-McCarthyism as in its sexual politics. The themes that come through most clearly here are fear of women and hatred of youth: the teen-age girls of Salem squeal and writhe, and the hero, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis)—the manliest man in the colonies—swings from the gallows. Also with Winona Ryder, Paul Scofield, Joan Allen, and Bruce Davison.—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Baronet, and Lincoln Square.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) she has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

Everyone Says I Love You—Woody Allen's latest movie is one of his frothiest, and weirdest, to date: a throwback picture that tries to resurrect the spirit of thirties musicals without recourse to irony. People dance in the streets—a conceit made somewhat simpler by the fact that the streets in question are seldom far from Park Avenue. There is a deliberate roughness to both the singing (which is kind of charming) and the choreography (which is unwieldy and a little graceless). The all-star cast includes a few Allen first-timers, and the plot, as you might expect, is a multiple quest for love. Woody falls for Julia Roberts, Tim Roth seduces Drew Barrymore, Alan Alda tries not to lose control of his family, and so forth; to keep the soufflé from collapsing, Allen throws in a few scenes in Paris and Venice. There is plenty to wince at; the big, splashy numbers don't work as well as the intimate croonings (not least Woody's own timid, barely audible rendition of "I'm Thru with Love"). But who else would dare to make such a film these days? You emerge bemused but undeniably cheered up, partly because of the uncomplicated magic of the climax, in which Woody dances with an airborne Goldie Hawn on the bank of the Seine. It may be a shameless nod to "An American in Paris," but it's the most lyrical scene he's ever filmed.—A.L. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Village East Cinemas.)

Evita—At last, the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice comes to the screen. The problem is that it remains a rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. The fact that it's almost bereft of spoken dialogue is good news for Madonna, who, as Eva Perón, is barely required to speak or even to act. Jonathan Pryce is a sly and troubled Juan Perón, and Antonio Banderas prowls through the action as our friendly smoldering narrator. Alan Parker's picture blares and blazes at you without letup, and it works best when it's openly theatrical—only when it's over do you sense how little lay beneath the busy surface.—A.L. (1/6/97) (Chelsea West, Cinema I, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

Ghosts of Mississippi—Rob Reiner's well-intentioned film about the efforts of a Southern attorney (Alec Baldwin) to bring the killer of the civil-rights leader Medgar Evers to justice. Reiner's work here is less platitudinous than in his last movie, "The American President," and the histrionics of "A Few Good Men" have been kept to a minimum, but the film is bland and punchless. Baldwin does his usual top-notch work, and James Woods is good (in bad makeup) as the killer, Byron De La Beckwith (his snakelike delivery hits all the right notes), but Whoopi Goldberg, as Evers's widow, seems too contemporary. The film is seriously underwritten; the audience never gets a sense of what Evers was like, and, since it took decades to convict De La Beckwith, there's little tension in the story.—B.D. (19th Street East 6, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

Opening Jan. 24, Zdenek Sverak and Andrej Chalimon in "Kolya."

TERI SANDERS

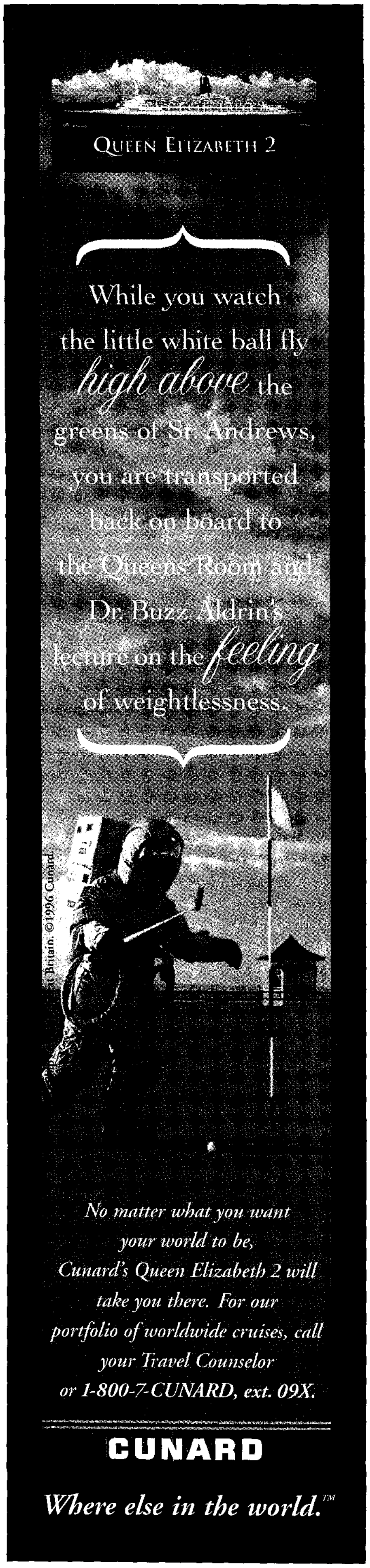
Hamlet—It's Shakespeare's most richly ambiguous tragedy, but there's nothing sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought about *this* production. Kenneth Branagh's film uses the full text of the play (the running time is nearly four hours), and it's shot in 70 mm., on gigantic, ornate sets and the imposing grounds of Blenheim Palace. The approach is daringly straightforward: in each scene, Branagh's aim is to make literal, material sense of the play's complex action and of the characters' often confused motivations. The director himself plays the unhappy Prince, and so lucidly that every shift in the volatile character's mood seems perfectly natural: the beauty of the performance lies in its awareness of how *reasonable* Hamlet's scruples are. Derek Jacobi, as Claudius, and Julie Christie, as Gertrude, are also superb. Laurence Olivier called his own 1948 film "a study in 'Hamlet'"; Branagh's version is no study, but the huge, unwieldy thing itself, staged with exhilarating clarity and force. Also with Richard Briers (Polonius), Kate Winslet (Ophelia), Nicholas Farrell (Horatio), Michael Maloney (Laertes), Brian Blessed (the Ghost), and, in small roles, Jack Lemmon, Gérard Depardieu, Charlton Heston, Billy Crystal, and Robin Williams.—T.R. (1/13/97) (Paris.)

I'm Not Rappaport—Herb Gardner directs his own adaptation of his 1985 play, about two old men (Walter Matthau and Ossie Davis) who meet daily on a bench in Central Park. (First & 62nd Cinemas and Regency.)

Jackie Chan's First Strike—A middling Jackie Chan feature, hilariously edited down from its original Hong Kong release and poorly dubbed. The truncated story—it's impossible to follow—seems to concern a nuclear weapon and the C.I.A., but the film exists solely for its action set pieces. Chan's sensationally choreographed fights still ring with humor, and there are some spectacular stunts (one on the ledge of a high-rise that's pure insanity); the star's movements have become so graceful that he can't sweep change off the dresser without inspiring awe. The movie is a disappointment after last year's far superior "Supercop," but for fans of this most artistic of action performers it's still a welcome visit.—B.D. (84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Gotham Cinema; through Jan. 23.)

Jerry Maguire—Tom Cruise plays the title character, who is a glib, cocky agent for professional athletes. In the fluid opening scenes, the movie, which was written and directed by Cameron Crowe, promises to be something unusual—a comedy about the spiritual crisis of a shallow man. But the star quickly reverts to his familiar feisty, can-do shtick, and Crowe loses control of the fragile comic tone. Also with Renee Zellweger, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Bonnie Hunt.—T.R. (12/16/96) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Marvin's Room—Jerry Zaks's drama (adapted by the late Scott McPherson from his 1990 play) begins with row upon row of pills and potions; if you think you're in for a strength-through-illness picture, you're right. Bessie (Diane Keaton), who spends her time caring for her bedridden father (Hume Cronyn), discovers that she herself has leukemia; the search for a bone-marrow donor leads her to her sister, Lee (Meryl Streep), whom she hasn't seen in twenty years. When Lee arrives with her dysfunctional son, Hank (Leonardo DiCaprio), you just know that Bessie


QUEEN ELIZABETH 2

While you watch the little white ball fly *high above* the greens of St. Andrews, you are transported back on board to the Queens Room and Dr. Buzz Aldrin's lecture on the *feeling* of weightlessness.

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is going to get to work on his functions. The story is meant to be stirring and intense, but the only way to resist the cloying sentimentality is to regard it as an acting workshop: compare and contrast the styles of the hard, hyper Streep and the tender Keaton. Both women give it all they've got, but the film doesn't deserve their generosity. DiCaprio is highly convincing as the young curmudgeon (more so than Robert De Niro as a dotty doctor).—A.L. (1/20/97) (Lincoln Square, 68th St. Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

Michael—Holiday candy from Nora Ephron, about a cynical tabloid reporter (William Hurt) who goes to Iowa to cover a story about an angel (John Travolta); it pointlessly reheats half a dozen old screwball and sentimental plots. The one new joke is that this angel is no halo-wearing, harp-strumming innocent: he specializes in fighting and sex. Travolta throws himself into it, but the script is so vulgar and sophomoric that it makes him look like an over-eager first-time actor. Andie MacDowell is the love interest.—S.K. (Beekman, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Mother—Albert Brooks directed, co-wrote (with Monica Johnson), and stars in this comedy, which has a dynamite premise: he plays a writer who's had problems with women and moves back in with his befuddled mother (Debbie Reynolds) in order to discover where he went wrong. Reynolds dispenses with her Vegas sassiness (deliciously ribbed on recent episodes of "Saturday Night Live") for a quiet, sensible turn here, but the writing does her a disservice. Her character pinches pennies without being miserly, she embarrasses her son without malice, and she's so mired in her habits that she never really gets to teach him anything about herself or women in general. The film flounders around trying to make tired points; Brooks gets his fair share of funny asides, but he goes beyond his usual subversive whininess into mean-spirited crankiness—and a lack of generosity is fatal for a comedy that's meant to charm. A dismissable subplot involves Rob Morrow as the younger brother Mom always liked better.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

The People vs. Larry Flynt—Milos Forman's film chronicles the sexual adventures, medical travails, and legal battles of Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson)—the creator of the unprecedentedly crude skin magazine *Hustler*—and his raunchy wife, Althea (Courtney Love). For an hour or so, it's a cheerful and unpretentious picaresque comedy (slightly marred by a trace of "only in America" condescension), but it turns sentimental and smugly high-minded in its second half: having gone to great lengths to humanize its disreputable hero and heroine, the movie then makes the mistake of trying to canonize them. Also with Edward Norton, Brett Harrelson, James Cromwell, Crispin Glover, and Donna Hanover. Screenplay by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski.—T.R. (1/13/97) (Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Portrait of a Lady—Henry James's most celebrated novel has become, under the guidance of director Jane Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones, an intense and lengthy monotone. Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman) arrives in a sombre, repressive England, then travels to an Italy that's not much better; there she marries Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich), even though anyone in the audience could tell her to steer clear. With Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett and Barbara Hershey, in what is easily the most potent performance in the picture, as the mysterious Madame Merle.—A.L. (1/6/97) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Relic—A strongly produced monster movie (by "Terminator" producer Gale Anne Hurd), with some swanky cinematography by its director, Peter Hyams, and an atmosphere cleverly derived from disaster films like "The Poseiden Adventure." While the acting barely registers (Tom Sizemore and Penelope Ann Miller are the stars), the relentless pacing and the paint-by-numbers plot (a monster is loose in a Chicago natural-history museum) give the film the easy allure of a no-brainer. Hyams wastes time early on with some overdone fright scenes, but the second half of the movie, a nonstop assault by the predator on victims in the locked-down building, succeeds in giving the audience some bang for its buck.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Scream—An entertaining horror comedy in which the director Wes Craven and his scriptwriter, Kevin Williamson, take the clichés of fright films and reinvigorate them with a cheeky knowingness: the victims are horror-movie aficionados who in many instances make the same mistakes they've joked about seeing made on screen. With help from an unusually strong cast—Drew Barrymore, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, and David Arquette all do smashing work—Craven wrings some real thrills from the familiar perils of all those teen-age gorefests.—B.D. (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Waverly.)

Secrets & Lies—Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), the heroine of Mike Leigh's broadest and most ambitious film to date, decides after the death of her adoptive mother to seek her biological one. The quest turns up Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), who freaks out: Hortense is middle-class and black, Cynthia working-class and white. Jean-Baptiste gives a quiet, pacific performance; Blethyn deals in spasms of exaggeration which belong in another film altogether. Still, there is a fine supporting cast, and they all gather in the final scene, a cathartic barbecue that starts off as nicely choreographed light comedy and darkens to a Bergman-like chorus of wailing women and slightly overcooked dialogue.—A.L. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud (who's in especially buoyant comic form).—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Cinema II; through Jan. 23.)

Some Mother's Son—A picture that traces the friendship of two Irish women (Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan) whose sons have joined the 1981 I.R.A. hunger strike at Maze Prison. Directed by Terry George, who co-wrote the screenplay with Jim Sheridan. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Thieves (Les Voleurs)—A thriller from André Téchiné, about a French policeman (Daniel Auteuil), his brother (Didier Bezace), the brother's mistress (Laurence Côte), and the mistress's lover (Catherine Deneuve). In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

The Whole Wide World—The relationship of Novalyne Price Ellis (Renee Zellweger) and the writer Robert E. Howard (Vincent D'Onofrio) in the nineteen-thirties is the basis for a film directed by Dan Ireland. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Carnegie Hall Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

beavis and butt-head do america: Manhattan Twin and State. . . . **beverly hills ninja:** Art Greenwich Twin, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and 64th and 2nd. . . . **big night** (reviewed in our issue of 9/23/96): Cinema 3 and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **caught:** Quad Cinema. . . . **daylight:** National Twin. . . . **the first wives club:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **the garden of the finzi-continis:** Quad Cinema. . . . **101 dalmatians** (12/9/96): 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 4, and Metro Cinema. . . . **jingle all the way:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **the long kiss goodnight:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **looking for richard:** 59th Street East Cinema and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **metro:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, Embassy 2, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **one fine day:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and National Twin. . . . **ridicule:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **sleepers** (11/4/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **sling blade:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **swingers:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas and The Screening Room. . . . **turbulence:** Art Greenwich Twin, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 34th Street Showplace. . . . **william shakespeare's romeo & juliet:** Worldwide Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Battle of San Pietro (1943)—Generally regarded as perhaps the greatest wartime documentary ever made. It was shot by six Signal Corps cameramen, under Major John Huston's direction; he wrote and spoke the factual narration, which shades into austere irony. The film got into trouble with the Army and was cut from five reels to the thirty-three minutes that remain, but you wouldn't guess it. This doesn't seem like a cut film; it has its own perfection.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 24 and Jan. 28.)

Eraserhead (1977)—David Lynch worked for five years to complete this first feature, which was shot (mostly at night) in 35-mm. black-and-white. He was the writer, the director, and the set designer, and was also responsible for the wonderfully grubby special effects. He pulls you inside wormy states of anxiety: time seems completely still while the hero, Henry (John Nance), moves through streets reminiscent of the ones Peter Lorre sidled through in "M." Henry appears to come out of the viewer's subconscious; he experiences a man's worst fears of courtship and marriage and fatherhood (to a whimpering monster). The slow, strange rhythm is very unsettling and takes some getting used to, but it's an altogether amazing, sensuous film, and the soundtrack (the soundman was Alan R. Splet) is as original and peculiar as the imagery.—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; Jan. 25-26.)

The Lost World (1925)—The key to the charm of Arthur Conan Doyle's pioneer science-fiction adventure (the ancestor of "Jurassic Park" and its sequel, also called "The Lost World") is that the author found a central character as dynamic as his dinosaurs: Professor George Edward Challenger, the prototype of the cantankerous "action intellectual" in pop fiction. Wallace Beery is superbly blustery in this boldly designed silent version of the novel, which follows Challenger's trip to an Amazon plateau that time forgot. The director, Harry Hoyt, adroitly mixes live creatures (such as a couple of cute bears) into the jungle journey, and even when Challenger and his fellow-explorers confront ape-men in awful makeup, the cast (including Bessie Love, Lewis Stone, and Lloyd Hughes) maintains the proper awe and fright. The prehistoric giants of special-effects master Willis O'Brien are more poetically primordial than today's computer-generated reptiles; it's as if they were made not by hand but by fang and claw.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 25.)

The Thin Man (1934)—Directed by the whirlwind W. S. Van Dyke, the Dashiell Hammett detective novel took only sixteen days to film, and the result was one of the most popular pictures of its era. It started a new cycle in screen entertainment by demonstrating that a murder mystery could also be a sophisticated screwball comedy. And it turned several decades of movies upside down by showing a suave man of the world (William Powell) who made love to his own rich, funny, and good-humored wife (Myrna Loy); as Nick and Nora Charles, Powell and Loy startled and delighted the country by their heavy drinking (without remorse) and unconventional diversions. The cast includes a famous wirehaired terrier, called Asta here.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Jan. 26-27.)

A Tickle in the Heart (1996)—Klezmer musicians who have performed together for most of this century, the Epstein Brothers are such earthy, natural showmen that they keep this atmospheric documentary from falling into reverence or sentimentality. Whether playing their folkish, jazzy, sinuous tunes for neighbors in Florida or for concertgoers in Germany, they have a knack for reading their audience (the high point comes when they cajole German fans into singing along in Yiddish). The director, Stefan Schwietert, films in a textured black-and-white that helps dry out any schmalz, adopting a calm, appreciative pace that allows the brothers' emotionality to play in the downtime between gigs. This eighty-four-minute tribute affects you like a sweet, potent wine, leaving you enlightened, and sated.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 22-30.)

At MOMA, films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (shown here in 1967).

COURTESY RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER FOUNDATION ARCHIVE

The Unknown (1927)—There's no odder number on Tod Browning's boulevard of broken nightmares than this supremely creepy descent into the pits of masochistic romance. It stars Lon Chaney as Alonzo the Armless, a circus knife-thrower who's virtuosic with the daggers between his toes but all thumbs with the sexy yet man-fearing Nanon (Joan Crawford), the target in his act and the object of his desire. Nanon hates male hands because she hates being pawed, but despite Alonzo's evident handlessness this partnership is made in hell. Browning and Chaney were masters at exploiting fascinating freakishness; this sixty-one-minute flight of horrific fancy depends on a series of grotesque switcheroos that both jolt the nervous system and instill a long-lasting queasiness. The Alloy Orchestra's new score skillfully counterpoints the pulse of a warped psychology with the wistful strains of stunted romance.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 24-26.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**theatre 2:** A series of film noir based on novels by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich (a.k.a. William Irish), and James M. Cain. Jan. 22: "Phantom Lady" (1944, Robert Siodmak) and "The Leopard Man" (1943, Jacques Tourneur). . . . Jan. 23: "Time to Kill" (1942, Herbert I. Leeds), "Satan Met a Lady" (1936, William Dieterle), and "Mr. Dynamite" (1935, Alan Crosland). . . . Jan. 24-25: "Double Indemnity" (1944, Billy Wilder) and "Strangers on a Train" (1951, Alfred Hitchcock). . . . Jan. 26-27: "The Maltese Falcon" (1941, John Huston) and "The Thin Man" (†). . . . Jan. 28: "The Chase" (1946, Arthur Ripley) and "Street of Chance" (1942, Jack Hively). . . . **theatre 3:** "The Big Sleep" (1945, Howard Hawks), with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg), and "Microcosmos" (1996, Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Jan. 24 at 3 and Jan. 28 at 6: "The Battle of Midway" (1942, John Ford), "The Battle of San Pietro" (†), and "Let There Be Light" (1946, John Huston). . . . ¶ A program of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German, with English subtitles. Jan. 24 at 6: "Merchant of Four Seasons" (1971). . . . Jan. 24 at 8: "The Marriage of Maria Braun" (1978). . . . Jan. 25 at 2 and Jan. 27 at 6: "Love Is Colder Than Death" (1969). . . . Jan. 25 at 5 and Jan. 27 at 2:30: "Katzelmacher" (1969). . . . Jan. 26 at 2 and Jan. 28 at 6: "Gods of the Plague" (1969). . . . Jan. 26 at 5 and Jan. 28 at 2:30: "Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?" (1969). . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 6 and Jan. 26 at 2:30: "Heart of Spain" (1937) and "The Spanish Earth" (1937, Joris Ivens). . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 2:30: "40,000 Years of Dreaming—A Century of Australian Cinema" (1996, George Miller). . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 5: "Louisiana Story" (1948, Robert Flaherty). . . . ¶ Jan. 26 at 5: "Strange Victory" (1948, Leo Hurwitz).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Jan. 22 at 2 and 6:30: "Arguing the World" (1996, Joseph Dorman). . . . Jan. 22 at 4:15 and 8:45, Jan. 23 at 2 and 4, Jan. 25 at 4 and 6, Jan. 26 at 5, 7, and 9, and Jan. 27 at 2, 4, 6, and 8: "A Tickle in the Heart" (†). . . . Jan. 24 at 6:30 and 9, Jan. 25 at 9, and Jan. 26 at 2: "The Unknown" (†). . . . Jan. 25 at 11 and 1:30: "The Lost World" (†).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—A program of films based on Jules Verne novels. Jan. 24 at 7: "Michael Strogoff" (1926, Victor Tourjansky; French intertitles, with live English translation). . . . Jan. 25 at noon: "Jules Verne" (1994, Pierre Tridivic; in French), a documentary. . . . Jan. 25 at 2: "On the Comet" (1970, Karel Zeman). . . . Jan. 25 at 4: "An Invention for Destruction" (1958, Zeman; in Czech). . . . Jan. 25 at 6: "The Mysterious Island" (1961, Cy Enderfield). . . . Jan. 25 at 8:15: "Around the World in 80 Days" (1956, Michael Anderson). . . . Jan. 26 at 1:15: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" (1916, Stuart Patron; silent). . . . Jan. 26 at 4: "In Search of the Castaways" (1962, Robert Stevenson). . . . Jan. 26 at 6:15: "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" (1954, Richard Fleischer). . . . Jan. 26 at 9: "Journey to the Center of the Earth" (1959, Henry Levin). . . . ¶ Jan. 28 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Les Gauloises Bleues" (1968, Michel Cournot; in French).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Jan. 25-26 at 2 and 4:30: "Eraserhead" (†). . . . In the Nam June Paik Video Viewing Room, episodes of David Lynch's "Twin Peaks" will be shown. Jan. 25-31: Episode 1.

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—Jan. 28 at 7: "My Life to Live" (1962, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . Jan. 28 at 9: "Diary of a Lost Girl" (1929, G. W. Pabst; silent).

What gives a woman style?

"I'M NOTHING TO LOOK AT," the Duchess of Windsor admitted. Rita de Acosta Lydig paid no attention to what was "in fashion." Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis had none of the attributes of the ideal American girl, and Diana Vreeland never had money. Yet each of these women had a personal magnetism and allure so strong that she could "dominate a room from a footstool." How did they do it? And what can you learn from them?

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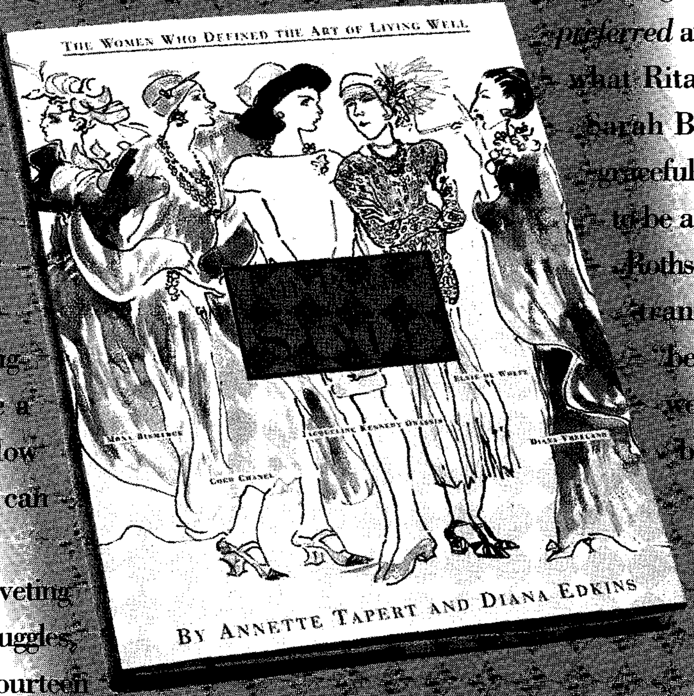
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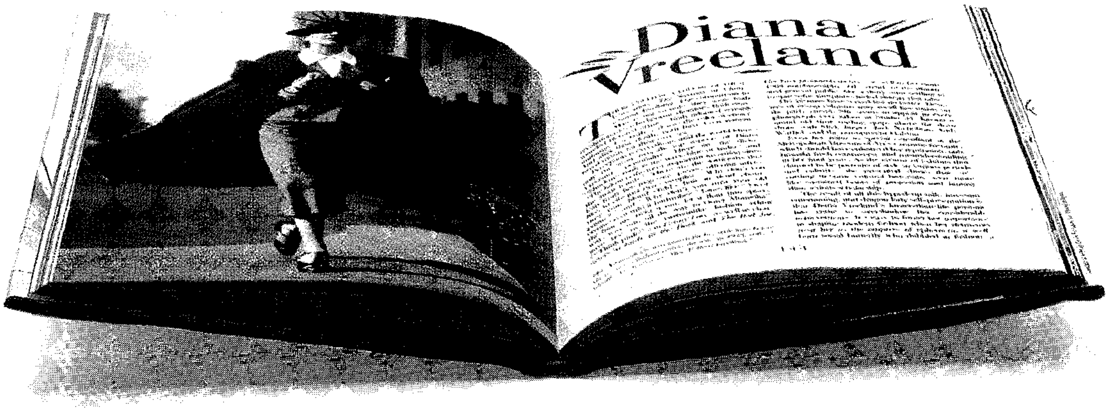
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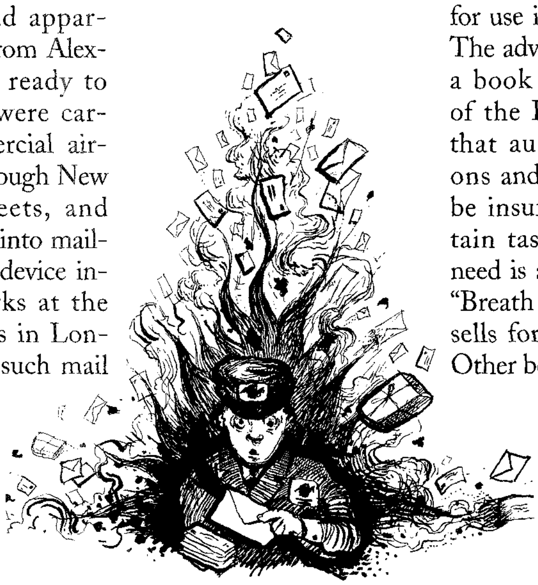
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

IT'S IN THE MAIL

On a typical day in Manhattan, the United States Postal Service delivers seven million thirty-four thousand pieces of mail. Last week, amid the J. Crew catalogues, utility bills, love letters, eviction notices, and junk mail, there were four bombs. No one was injured by these explosive devices, which were addressed to *Al Hayat*, an Arabic-language newspaper with offices at the United Nations. The bombs had apparently travelled from Alexandria, Egypt; ready to explode, they were carried on commercial airliners, driven through New York City streets, and stuffed by hand into mailbags. A similar device injured mail clerks at the *Al Hayat* offices in London. A dozen such mail bombs have arrived in the United States since the new year began. Mailroom workers throughout the city have grown jittery, raising numerous false alarms for the Police Department Bomb Squad.



According to figures compiled at the F.B.I. Bomb Data Center, the number of bombings in the United States each year has more than tripled since 1986. Although a good deal has been written about the availability of bomb-making techniques on the Internet, aspiring bombers nowadays need only visit Times Square, where there is a bookstore that carries a manual describing in extraordinary detail how to make "demolition-strength" explosives and detonators. Much more elaborate guides to bombs and other agents of mass destruction are now obtainable, like almost everything else, through the mail.

One glossy, full-color, eighty-page catalogue sells books on how to make C-4 plastic explosives, Semtex explosives, "advanced improvised booby traps," hand grenades, grenade launchers, land mines, letter bombs, incendiaries, car bombs, and a .22-calibre cigarette lighter for use in assassinations. The advertising copy for a book called "Breath of the Dragon" argues that automatic weapons and explosives may be insufficient for certain tasks: "What you need is a flamethrower." "Breath of the Dragon" sells for twelve dollars. Other books contain advice on how to mix poisons and wage germ warfare. In an era of direct marketing, of products aimed at a narrowly defined group of consumers, this catalogue seems to have found a niche. In addition to bomb manuals and kits for making phony identification cards, it sells videotapes on how to conceal weapons, an assortment of Waffen S.S. posters, and a book entitled "Screw the Bitch: Divorce Tactics for Men." There's a toll-free number; all major credit cards are accepted.

The widespread dissemination of texts on high explosives has helped terrorists construct mail bombs that are extremely hard to detect. One of last week's bombs passed unnoticed through X-ray machines at the United Nations Building, which has some of the tightest security in the world. The F.B.I. Bomb Data Center distributes a poster that gives tips on how to tell if a letter or a package contains an explosive device. The poster warns that excessive postage, no return address, a foreign postmark, misspelled words, a strange odor, and protruding wires may be signs of a bomb. One federal agent said last week, without irony, that "ticking sounds" may be another vital clue.

Although Inspector Paul Pless, of the Postal Inspection Service, says that the odds that any single piece of mail contains a bomb are slight, all it takes is the arrival of one bomb to achieve what a terrorist wants—to instill fear. Sights and sounds from the outside world enter our homes daily via telephones, televisions, radios, and computers. More tangible things arrive in the mail, often unsolicited. Everyday objects suddenly become ominous. (The explosive devices sent to the U.N. were disguised as greeting cards.) The most effective mail bombs are the most unassuming ones. In an age when great ingenuity is being devoted to creating deadly surprises, the only mail that poses no threat is E-mail. It may lack the human touch, the feel of old-fashioned correspondence, but it can't kill you.

KEEPER OF THE FLAME

A FRIEND writes:

To be a biographer is to court obsession. You spend months, even years, creating a narrative out of the life and death of your subject. You send the work

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOWARD COALE

out into the world with the hope that others will be moved by this life and this death. Over the years, obsession is replaced by a gnawing sense of incompleteness: life, from which you abstracted this telling of a life, has become disconnected from the life in that book. So it seemed to me until recently, when I learned of a remarkable story about a biographical subject brought back to life by the actions of a reader.

Jane Bowles

Last November, I received a letter from Alia Benlloch, an eighteen-year-old high-school student in Marbella, Spain, who had read my 1981 biography of Jane Bowles, "A Little Original Sin." Alia wrote that she had become "enchanted with that writer who nobody had ever heard of, with that creature who couldn't bend her leg." After finishing the book, Alia decided to go to the cemetery of San Miguel in Málaga, where Jane was buried in 1973, after a long illness. It took Alia three visits to find Jane's grave. Not only was the plot unmarked and littered with garbage; the entire cemetery was in "ruins, filthy, with many open tombs and broken crosses." A cemetery attendant informed Alia that San Miguel was to close soon, because a freeway was to be built over the property. And, because no one had claimed Jane's remains in response to official notification, her body would be thrown into a common grave. Alia tried to get in touch with Paul Bowles by letter, but she received no response, and so she paid for Jane to be moved and reburied in Marbella, about sixteen miles away. "You might be surprised by the way I acted," she wrote, "but somebody had to do it. I was the only one there at the difficult moment of such a big decision: it was take care of everything or leave it all carelessly." She ended her letter by inviting me to the exhumation, on November 13th.

I could not see myself as a graveside witness to the reburial of Jane. I called Alia to thank her and express my regrets. In conversation I found her to be deeply serious and levelheaded. She told me that she had gone to Tangier to get Paul Bowles's permission to move Jane's grave. Her father had accompanied her. They wandered through the streets for some time before finding someone who could tell them where the celebrated writer lived. Bowles was sitting up in his bed; he spends most of his time there because of pain in his leg. When Alia revealed the purpose of her visit, Paul said that he did not "believe in graves." He said further that he had nothing but the most terrible memories of Málaga, where Jane had been confined in a convent hospital for many years before her death. At this, Alia told me, she began to cry. Then she saw that there were tears in Paul's eyes.

Armed with Paul's permission, Alia returned to Málaga. On November 1st, an article appeared on the front page of the newspaper *El País* about a young student who had assumed the responsibility of moving Jane Bowles's grave. Articles about Jane's life began appearing in all the Spanish newspapers. Soon many women arrived at the San Miguel cemetery, bringing flowers and candles to Jane's grave. A reporter from Italian television called to interview Alia. She declined, saying, "This is not about me. It's about Jane Bowles."

Shortly afterward, I received a call from Alia, who told me that the authorities had decided that Jane Bowles was an essential figure in the city's literary history and could not be moved from Málaga. Yet no one would tell Alia when or where Jane's grave would be moved within the city. Alia decided to take her case to court, where she argued that she had Paul Bowles's permission to move the grave to Marbella, that she had paid the fees, and that she had already been granted permission by the authorities, so how could they revoke it? The court told her that it was going to be on vacation for some time.

When I last heard from Alia, on Christmas Eve, she told me that the court was still on vacation. She said, "Am I right to do this or are they right?" I did my best to reassure her, though I was not sure what "right" meant in this matter, officially or ethically. I wondered what Jane, who made a moral issue out of everything, including what to have for dinner, and who had an intensely ironic sense of humor, would have thought.

I wrote to Paul about the latest developments. He replied, "I feel rather sorry for the girl from Marbella. I don't see why she should be stopped from carrying out her project." His use of the word "project" for the moving of his wife's grave seemed so characteristically Paul that I laughed. He ended his letter with the words "But it is extraordinary that so much interest should have been aroused at this late date. . . . It shows that the age of books is not yet over."

THE QUIET AMERICAN

EDWARD ABINGTON, the American consul-general in Jerusalem, is the man no one mentions. Like all good diplomats, he takes pains in public to make himself as unobtrusive as possible. But if you watched the signing of the Hebron agreement on the news last week, you certainly saw him. He was the unnamed red-haired figure in a dark suit standing behind Yasir Arafat. And he was there because, for more than three years now, as Washington attempted to make the Oslo peace accords hold, he has been the United States' point man with the Palestinians. Many observers, in fact, consider this quiet American to have been a crucial figure in getting the Hebron deal done.

A mild-mannered Texan with a slight drawl, Abington looks like the last person in the world you would imagine sitting through the night in Gaza and arguing the minutiae of peace in Arabic and English with the mercurial, autocratic president of the Palestinian Authority. But that is just where he has been, and he remembers those nights vividly.

Edward Abington

"I've seen Arafat more than two hundred times since he came back to the West Bank in 1994," Abington said, in the living room of his house, a relic of pre-Israel Palestine, as he contemplated his midafternoon lunch of a tuna sandwich, some twelve hours after the Hebron accord was signed. "In the State Department, we all feel that close personal contact is a very important thing in this part of the world. And I feel close to Arafat—

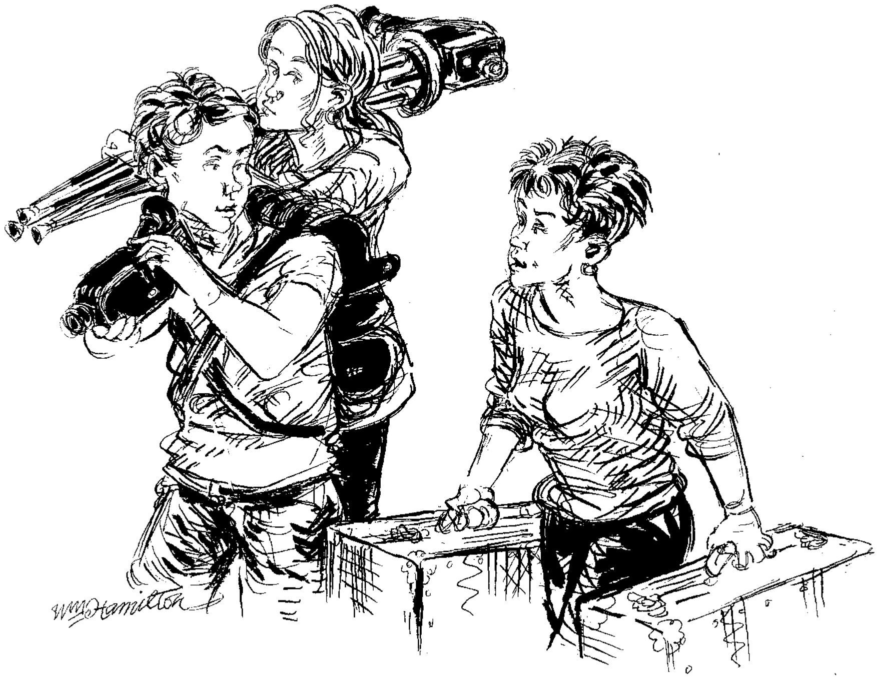
I bring my six-year-old daughter, Alex, down to Gaza sometimes to visit him and his wife, Suha, and to play with their baby. Trust is crucial, and it takes time to establish. He and I are by now very up front with each other when we've got a problem. He appreciates candor."

Abington, who is fifty-three, is known for his tirelessness, but he seemed exhausted, which for him meant that his eyes were a little puffy. "It's been like a marathon," he said. "For seven days a week, I'd sit in the negotiations at the Laromme Hotel, in Jerusalem, for ten to twelve hours a night, then get three or four hours of sleep, and go down to Gaza to see Arafat. When there was the serious crisis last September, and the Israelis were massed outside the Palestinian town of Nablus and ready to go in, I rushed down to Gaza to be with him. There was a standoff at Joseph's Tomb, where five or six Israeli soldiers had been killed, and Arafat was getting all these calls from his people, which were feeding Palestinian paranoia. It was clearly a moment when the whole peace process was on the verge of going down the tubes. I just stayed and stayed, explaining to him over and over that the Israelis were scared, too, and finally, at five in the morning, I helped broker the first telephone call between Arafat and Netanyahu during the crisis."

The seventy miles between Gaza and Jerusalem has been Abington's virtual office for years. The Palestinian leader's schedule, he said, has been even worse. "Arafat naps for a few hours every afternoon and then works until four or four-thirty in the morning. Then he goes to bed, sleeps for three hours, gets up, has breakfast, plays with his daughter for exactly half an hour, and comes back to work. I take vacations. He never takes vacations, although he did tell me once that before he became involved in the nationalist cause he drove a Thunderbird convertible and used to go to the South of France. He gets nostalgic about those days."

Abington expects to be reassigned to a new job in Washington this summer. "Because of our closeness," he said, "some people think that Arafat will freak out when it begins to sink in that I'm leaving Jerusalem. But peace is inevitable. I don't believe Netanyahu can let it die on the vine. There is no alternative but to continue. Now that I've had a few hours' sleep, I feel a great sense of personal accomplishment and pride in what the U.S. has done here."

Abington picked up a thermos of coffee and began to get ready to go down to Gaza once more, this time to celebrate at the Arafats' *iftar*, the traditional Muslim post-sunset meal breaking the day's Ramadan fast. Imagining his future in Foggy Bottom, he said, "I'll be like a junkie who kicks the habit. I think I'm going to have severe decompression problems."



"They say she's gone completely Sundance."

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ICELANDIC THRUST

MANY people may be a little downhearted from the weight of heavy winter coats, but Joe Boxer, the company that has transformed dowdy boxer shorts into glow-in-the-dark boxers or boxers with, say, happy faces, has limitless enthusiasm about displaying its latest line of underwear in Iceland. The show, at the Reykjavik airport in April, will be the culmination of the travelling extravaganza called Women's Fashion Week. Joe Boxer is going to fly in a hundred and fifty fashion luminaries—"take over a small country for a weekend," in the words of Nicholas Graham, the company's ebullient designer and C.E.O. A "frozen underpants toss"—that's women's underpants—is promised.

A conversation with Graham went like this:

What's the point of Iceland?

"What's the point? It's a glacier on top of a volcano. And the girls are incredibly pretty. It's the island with the most beautiful women in the world, and plus it has the longest days in the world, too. What more could a guy want?"

Isn't it dark most of the time?

"There's about three hours of daylight now. In April, the sun rises at six-thirty and goes down about ten in the evening. It'll be pretty normal."

Did you think of any other places?

"I thought of Greenland. It's too big. It's the size of Europe."

Will there be dancing on the runways or anything?

"We're taking Broadway and Seventh Avenue to Iceland—it might be 'Chicago,' but I'm not sure yet. The show itself will be in an airport hangar. There'll be a sit-down dinner. We'll be serving reindeer and Icelandic salmon to a couple of hundred people, and then we'll open the hangar to the whole country. It's a big deal."

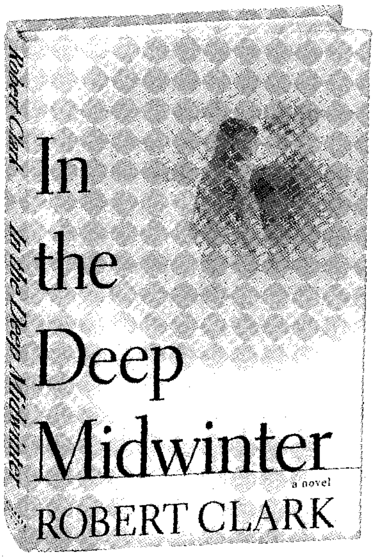
What else are you showing?

"Boys' sportswear, men's activewear, children's sleepwear, socks, watches, pajamas, and swimwear, but underwear is the thrust."

Do Icelandic people have a particular thing for underwear?

"I'm not sure yet. We visited last week. Everyone was wearing underwear, and that's a good sign." ♦

"It's in the Mail," Eric Schlosser; "Keeper of the Flame," Millicent Dillon; "The Quiet American," Amy Wilentz; "Icelandic Thrust," Alison Rose.



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THE CONSULTANT

What Dick Morris did for the President—and to the Presidency.

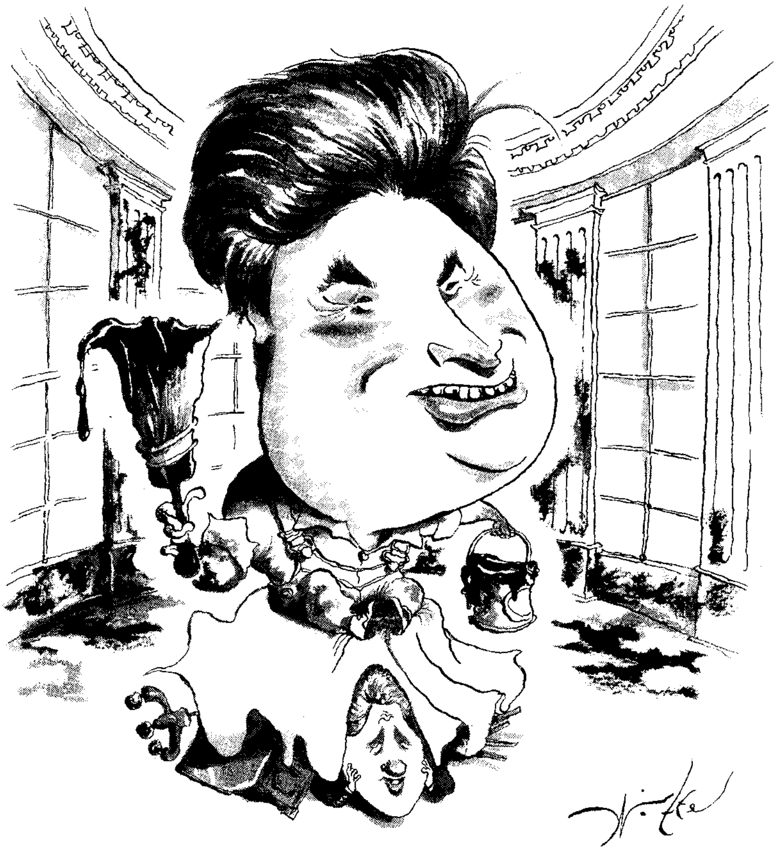
BY JOE KLEIN

DICK MORRIS begins his memoir of the Clinton reëlection campaign with a signed apology. His signature is reproduced right there on the page. He says that he has been "out of control, driven by my ego." He has betrayed his wife, and "violated" the trust of the President of the United States. "I cannot excuse my behavior," he confesses. And the grovelling has only just begun: he apologizes obsequiously, extravagantly, and flatulently throughout "Behind the Oval Office." He apologizes five times, by his own count, to Hillary Rodham Clinton for breaking a confidence. He apologizes for working on Jesse Helms's infamous 1990 Senate campaign. He admits, at various points, to being arrogant, self-destructive, thoughtless, and immature. He admits to "exploiting" a prostitute, and letting her listen—for only a moment, but still!—to the President's voice on the telephone. ("What was I thinking?" he asks. "I wasn't thinking.") But then he also admits that being considerate of others isn't one of his strengths. He was an only child, born prematurely. He suspects that he was "mildly autistic." His parents sent him, at age six, to a "desolate" sleepaway camp on the "lonely" Maine shore. "Only after years of therapy did I begin to understand how this early deprivation affected my personality," he writes. Indeed, "As Eileen"—his soon-to-be-ex-wife—"and my therapist, Dr. Elizabeth Hauser, softened my rage and brought me inner peace for the first time in my life, I decided to abandon negative advertising as a métier." He goes on like that: Uriah Heep on the couch.

Given such vigorous psycho-acrobatics and the portentous tone, last week's media reaction to the publication of this remarkable volume—something less than the expected earthquake—must have been galling to Morris. He obviously believes that he has created something profound, even historic (a favorite word) here. Three times, he recounts a conversation with the President that apparently took place last August, about ten days before Morris's relationship with the prostitute was exposed in the press, during the Democratic Convention. He tells the President that he is writing a book. Clinton is not displeased. They both have a duty to history, the President says, and he continues, "It's very likely unique in American history for a relationship like this to exist. I just ask two things as you write or talk about it. First, that you do so after the election is over. Second, that it be right for you and right for me. . . . Right for Bill Clinton and right for Dick Morris."

Well. It might be argued that this unintentional howler is precisely that: just what Morris and Clinton deserve. The President begins his second term an almost Pyrrhic victor, the object of rising and vehement disdain in Washington. And Dick Morris was overripe long before his fetishes hit the tabloids. He seems ridiculous now, the perpetrator of a gruesome Freudian burlesque, his self-destruction complete. But the totality of the flameout seems disproportionate, the media reaction a bit too brusque: Morris's success was too substantial to be so easily dismissed.

DICK MORRIS was never much liked, or even very well respected, in the political community, and yet just a year ago he was perhaps the most influential man in Washington—the President's chief strategist and a secret adviser to the rising congressional power in the Republican Party, Senator Trent Lott, of Mississippi. One of the book's long-suspected "revelations" is that Clinton used Morris as a back-channel interlocutor with Lott, which sounds shadier and more significant than it probably was. Far more important was the intellectual impact that Morris seemed to have on both men: he was the architect of the consensual banality that overwhelmed American politics in 1996 and dominates it still. Morris—with a strong assist from his pollsters, Mark Penn and Doug Schoen—decided that the most effective way for Bill Clinton to win the election was to *go positive.* This seemed a novel turn of events: a political consultant more concerned with new ideas than with opposition research. Not big ideas, Morris admits, but "bite-sized" ones. And nothing that didn't "poll" well. (Note to Dr. Hauser: Negative advertising was never entirely abandoned by Morris's team, as Newt Gingrich learned rather painfully.) What Morris knew—intuitively at first and then through polling—was that a President who had often seemed feckless and overmatched now needed to appear more dependable, substantial, *specific.* This was no mean insight.



Morris saw himself as the Clintons' housepainter: "When you called me, you knew I'd want to put the furniture in the center of the room."

MICHAEL WITTE

The White House staff suddenly found itself retrieving shards of programs and rhetoric that had been stuck in the middle levels of the Administration—school uniforms, flex time, tax relief for home-sellers, and dozens more. Morris set a quota of two new ideas a week. "I've got thirty coming between now and the election," he told me in late spring of 1996. There were major proposals amid the trivia—welfare reform and a balanced-budget plan, to name two—but almost all the ideas were either Republican initiatives or echoes of the New Democrat posture that Clinton had assumed in the 1992 campaign and then discarded after the election.

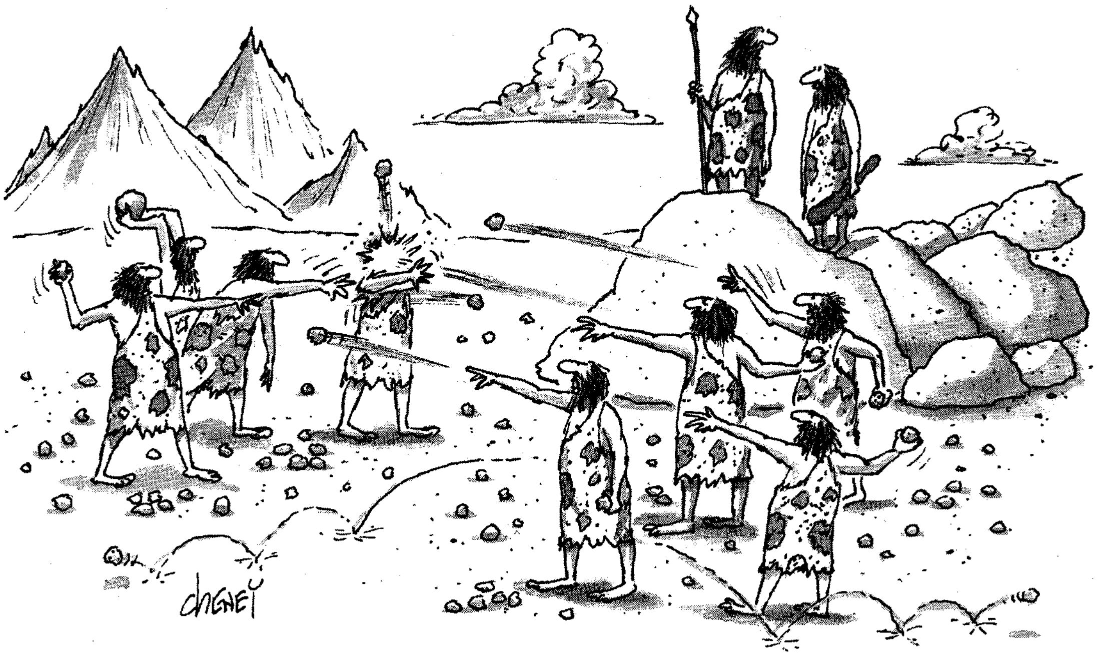
Even so, Morris acted as if he had discovered something fundamental and huge. This wasn't just an electoral strategy, he insisted; the President had hit upon a new style, perhaps even a new philosophy, of governance: using precise, sophisticated polling to find out what the people wanted. "We used polling not to determine which positions he would take," Morris insists, "but to figure out which of the positions he had already taken were the most popular." No doubt the President's tendency to take a great many positions on a great many issues eased the process significantly. "Polls, used in this way, are not the instrument of the mob," Morris instructs. "They offer the prospect of leadership wedded to a finely calibrated measurement of opinion."

If Morris actually believes such twaddle, it is only intermittently. His true feelings about what he does, and what he was selling in 1996, slip out in a remarkably patronizing lecture he delivers to the First Lady. For the most part, Hillary Rodham Clinton is treated gently here. She is portrayed as warmer than her husband, as better organized, and as a committed pragmatist; indeed, she's the one who summons Morris to "save" Bill Clinton's career in 1980 and again in 1994. But she isn't always pleased with the results. And, on one occasion, she complains to Morris about his "efforts to move to the center." As it happened, Morris's Connecticut house was being painted at the time, and he was dissatisfied with the progress of the job. "Now I used the painters as a metaphor in my reply" to the First Lady: he was the Clintons' housepainter. They summoned him every few years for cosmetic work. " 'But when you called me, you knew I'd want to put the furniture in the center of the room. The center, the middle,' I repeated to be sure the metaphor was not lost on her. 'Then I cover it up with canvas, and I paint the walls and ceiling.' I made a painting motion with my hand. . . . 'When the walls are painted . . . I go away. Then you have four years to put the furniture back exactly as you and your husband wish.' "

Dick Morris, clearly, is a mortal *spritzer.* He can't control himself. He riffs relentlessly. He can go on for paragraphs about the many ways Bill Clinton resembles Abraham Lincoln: each was a dark-horse candidate from a small "western" state, without much Washington experience; each was elected with around forty per cent of the vote in a three-way race; each "was deeply suspected by his own party and shunned by the opposition"; each had a circle of advisers who were not so much loyalists as "ambassadors to other realms of the party." (Each was pretty tall, too.)

Such fecundity takes real skill, but Morris has another talent, which adds mustard to his baloney-slicing: he knows when *not* to flatter a client. In a sea of fawning amateurs—Richard Neustadt, the Harvard historian, makes an embarrassing cameo appearance to praise Clinton for assembling "the best cabinet since Jefferson"—Morris can tell the President of the United States, "Stop making excuses all the time about why you lost in '94. It's just like '80. . . . Snap out of it."

THE two men do have a history. Clinton was Morris's first out-of-state client, and the story of their meeting rehearses one of the more traditionally satisfying American legends: the city slicker who takes and then is taken by the inspired rube. Bill Clinton was the attorney general of Arkansas, planning a 1978 campaign for governor; Dick Morris was an itinerant political consultant, travelling the country, hoping to sell the yokels on new, "advanced" scientific



"Trading is heavy today."

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methods of audience research that were being used in Hollywood. " 'And you just apply these techniques to politics?' Clinton asked."

"Back then Clinton was not the suave sophisticate he is now," Morris notes. But the young candidate did demonstrate many of the qualities that got him where he is today: as soon as he was elected governor, he sent the fast-talking New York housepainter packing. "In 1979, he fired me. Clinton had decided that it would be inappropriate for the governor to use the same polling and campaign tactics that had helped him get elected," Morris recalls. "He was in Eagle Scout mode." Eagle Scout mode didn't work. Clinton was soon tossed out of office. Hillary called Morris immediately after the defeat. "Bill needs you right now," she said.

Morris returned to Arkansas and found the youngest ex-governor in American history in a deep depression. His advice was to open the comeback campaign with an apology—for raising license-plate fees. Clinton refused. He "was inclined to grumble and brood over perceived slights in the columns of the Arkansas newspapers," Morris writes. "I told him that instead he should be out raising money." Raising money to get the curtain-raising "apology" spot on the air, that is. (Morris is an unabashed believer in non-stop television advertising; he makes a strong argument that it was effective in 1995 and 1996.) Back in 1982, Clinton moped—and balked. He wouldn't say it was wrong to raise license-plate fees, because he didn't think he'd been wrong. And so he finessed it: he acknowledged that many people were upset that he'd done it, he was sorry they were so upset, and he assured them, "When I was a boy growing up, my daddy never had to whip me twice for the same thing."

Morris was "amazed, just amazed." He says, "The line about his daddy was folksy and descriptive. . . . I could never have scripted such lines. And he had stayed within his principles. He wouldn't lie; he wouldn't apologize. He thought it was *right* to have raised the car-tag fees, damn it. But the voters would feel that they had heard an apology when he apologized for their pain and told his homespun story. 'This guy could be president,' I distinctly remember thinking."

Everything that follows is, essentially, embroidery on that anecdote. The Bill Clinton portrayed here is—privately—sour, passive, petulant, self-involved; he is rarely gracious or thoughtful. He feels no one's pain but his own. "I'll never get credit for that" is a constant refrain. "Faced with a problem he didn't know how to solve, he would as usual complain until somebody showed him a way to get around it," Morris writes. "He complained at every meeting, in every phone call, in every chat, endlessly and loudly."

But an odd thing happens when you put him in front of a camera, or a crowd. He comes alive. Suddenly, he's eloquent, compelling, empathetic. One thinks of Ronald Reagan and of other Potemkin-village public figures. The public Clinton is a performance hologram; the private Clinton is a stranger. No doubt, Morris is overstating this some—he tends to be summoned at Clinton's darkest moments, after electoral losses.

Still, the bifurcation is striking. After the Oklahoma City bombing, the President is having trouble explaining to his staff how to transform his sense of what the country is experiencing into a program of political action, so he orders Morris and George Stephanopoulos to watch him on television as he delivers a speech to Georgetown University students. They watch, bemused. "Where's the news peg?" Stephanopoulos wonders. Morris isn't sure. Then an epiphany: " 'Don't you see what he's doing?' I said to George. 'He hasn't been able to put these ideas together in his head and explain them to us, but in front of a thousand kids he can figure out how to say it in a way that reaches them. . . .' This was the birth of the values agenda in our political thinking."

Morris describes the moment of discovery with breathless awe, the Rosetta stone decoded: Americans were concerned about more than economic self-interest and postmodern social terrors—they were looking for a new spirit of community! The Republicans had dominated the debate on "values" issues, but in almost entirely negative terms. It was, Morris writes, "a strategy without positive focus, focus on what we *should* be doing to promote our values as a people. The president was creating a Democratic values agenda."

Actually, Clinton was revisiting the same values agenda—thoughtfully provided by the moderate Democratic Leadership Council, and particularly by its think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute—that he had run on successfully in 1992 and had seemed to discard after the election. There had been a vehement intellectual argument about these ideas at the time, with proponents maintaining that they constituted a new political path, a "third way"—an effort to achieve progressive goals through conservative means—and opponents from both left and right sniping that they constituted little more than an electoral ploy.

The "third way" certainly did poll well. Words like "opportunity" and "responsibility" and "community"—the same three that had appeared on the cover of the manifesto issued at the Democratic Leadership Council's 1991 conference, which effectively launched the Clinton candidacy—were still magic in 1995. Under Morris's direction, Mark Penn created a "values index," which, as Morris puts it, "accurately predicted whom the respondents would vote for in the presidential election!" Morris had found his plan. The "bite-sized" spew proceeded apace. Many of the ideas were bowdlerized versions of the New Democrat proposals, carefully stripped of rigor and nuance. (The more muscular New Democrat proposals—like an assault on "corporate welfare" to provide money for new education initiatives, and a challenge to the stultifying power of teachers' unions—were ignored.) "For years, the self-satisfied left has been arguing that our program was nothing more than a shallow political calculation," said Will Marshall, of the Progressive Policy Institute. (He might also have included the equally disdainful, self-satisfied right.) "Dick Morris's career must give them great satisfaction."

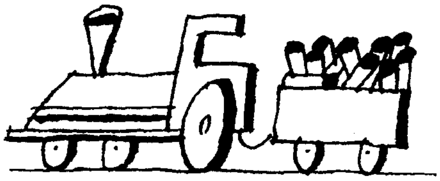
Indeed, as the campaign progressed, Morris seemed to lose track of the difference between polling and policy. "I came to love our weekly polls," he says. He collected remarkable amounts of data. He polled "every night" during the government shutdowns, to assess how the President was faring. He conducted "the mother of all polls" to prepare for the State of the Union address: "The survey was 259 questions long. It had to be divided into five parts, since no one would willingly stay on the phone for the hours it would have taken to answer every question." He didn't poll merely on cosmetics, like where the President should spend his vacation, but asked deep, complicated questions, and got close enough to the substance of policy so that he began to mistake his results for reality. For example, Morris seemed convinced—as his data showed the public to be—that a balanced budget could be easily had. "Both parties had promulgated a deception: that the only way to balance the budget without higher taxes is by cutting vital services in Medicare, Medicaid, education, or environmental protection," he writes, certain that a magic bullet existed. (The bullet, apparently, was the ill-defined and undoubtedly phony cuts in "discretionary spending"—that is, everything but entitlements, debt service, and defense—proposed by both parties to achieve the appearance of balance.)

For a time, the President allowed Morris to attend staff meetings where actual policy, as opposed to campaign strategy, was discussed. It proved disastrous. George Stephanopoulos, a rival whom Morris obviously respects, appears to have initiated the necessary corrective. "Your numbers are full of shit," he tells the consultant at one staff meeting on budget policy. "You don't know what you're talking about."

Morris insists that the numbers came from the then director of the Office of Management and Budget, Alice Rivlin, and that the President—who "sat silently by while the diatribes continued"—ultimately came to his defense. Nevertheless, Clinton soon decides to isolate him again from the rest of the staff. Theatrics ensue. Morris quits in a huff, then—after an impenetrable interlude of psychobabble—proclaims another epiphany: "You want me to sit right there, on your left shoulder, like a bird, and whisper in your ear, three, four, five, ten times a day," he tells the President. "Then, if you choose, you can use my advice to control your staff, your campaign, your dealings with Congress . . . to empower you."

The President, Morris writes, "smiled broadly and said, 'You got it. I'll take what I want.' "

How much did Clinton actually take? He certainly took Morris's campaign strategy—and that was quite a lot. As always, the line between campaigning and governing is impossible to locate. If nothing else, Dick Morris's story is an object lesson in just how difficult it will continue to be for politicians to find that line, and in how seductive—and vacuous—today's techniques of electoral politics can be. Morris spins gossamer. He can judge whether people will respond positively or negatively to a turn of phrase, but he doesn't have any idea which of the phrases turned will have social consequences or what those consequences will be. His job is to create a program—or, perhaps, the appearance of one—that will palliate a majority. In 1996, he did this with sufficient skill to captivate the real leaders of both political parties, Bill Clinton and Trent Lott. He created a center that was not so much vital as virtual, a synthetic consensus bereft of grit or daring. "The assumption is that small is better, safe is better," says William A. Galston, a former Clinton aide who spent the first two years of the Administration losing more nuanced and substantive versions of the battles that Dick Morris eventually won. "The era of big government may be over, but the era of big challenges shouldn't be—and you can't meet big challenges with small ideas."



Both parties are now living with the fruits of the Morris consensus. The consequences appear to be both tawdry and profound. In the absence of substantial political disagreements, the media have little to fix on but scandals. The scandals may or may not turn out to be significant, but they have been virtually the only news seeping from Washington in recent months. A more profound consequence involves the question of how leaders should act in a time of plenty. Machiavelli believed that indolence was the greatest threat to a republic. He wondered how a society could keep its rigor and coherence without the imposed disciplines of wartime. This is a less drastic moment in history; the public consensus on most issues that Morris located and exploited is real. But Machiavelli's question does have some relevance as the second Clinton term begins: Why should the public pay any attention to political leaders if they are too timid to engage—or challenge, or inspire? Why should anyone listen if the only purpose of politics is to measure our whims? ♦

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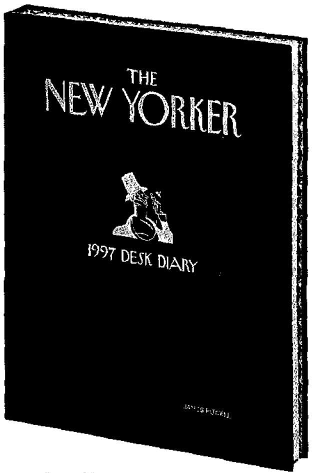

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OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

SPEAKING ACROSS THE DIVIDE

What's between Ebonics and the mainstream? According to one program for Harlem teen-agers, a better way to be heard.

BY JOHN LAHR

AFTER speech class last spring at the Juilliard School, just across the street from the white marble towers of high culture at Lincoln Center, it was the custom of Yasmin Moya-Gutierrez and Tanasha Bennett, two talented, college-bound citizens of Harlem, to take the subway home. The actual journey is about four miles, but the distance between worlds is much greater. When they stepped off the subway and into the bright, dishevelled uptown day, they were entering not just a different community but a different community of speech. Yasmin and Tanasha are both, in that sense, bilingual; they know that they must simultaneously be cool and defeat cool as they maneuver through the gantlet of street talk, which in some quarters these days goes under the name of Ebonics. As Yasmin, a svelte Dominican girl of eighteen, who has studied dance at Jacques D'Amboise's National Dance Institute and at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, bustles through her Latino turf, around 135th Street and Broadway, everything about her—her handsome face, her upright posture, her purposeful walk—is pitched against the prevailing lackadaisical uptown style, which, she tells me, she finds "bovine."

"I hear people yelling through megaphones about the sales going on in their bodegas," she says. "I hear guys trying to talk to a girl: 'Hey, baby!' 'Hey, Mami!' 'So many curves and me without brakes!' " Yasmin, who graduated last June from the Bronx High School of Science, scored in the top fifteen per cent nationally on her S.A.T.s, and is now a member of Bryn Mawr's class of 2000, doesn't "hang": her schedule was usually "from my house to school, from school to dance class to work to speech class." Yasmin stands apart from the street culture whose commotion surrounds her. "When I first heard 'It's brick outside,' I did not know what that was," she admits. "It means real cold. People would be like, 'Yo, man, it's freakin' brick.' And I'd be like, 'Brick'? O.K., red?"

Tanasha, on the other hand, a seventeen-

Denise Woods (center) with students Tanasha and Yasmin: "I don't want you to take this technique and become someone else. I want you to find you." Photograph by Amy Arbus.

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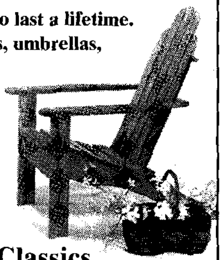

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year-old African-American with short-cropped hair and a bounce in her step, who attends Brooklyn Tech, faces down the street talk with what she calls her "nobody-can-beat-me attitude." As she explains it, "Can't nobody beat me. Can't nobody do anything to me. Because somebody's always gonna try to challenge me." And somebody always does. When she walks through her stomping ground, on 151st Street between Broadway and Amsterdam, the Dominican guys holler, "Girl, speak!"

She explains, "If I don't answer, it's always 'You can't speak to me now? *Tu fea!*' They think I don't know what it means. It means 'ugly.' I keep on going." Tanasha's way of adapting to her dangerous terrain is to become fierce herself. "Uptown, I'm evil," Tanasha says, following the street practice of changing or inverting meanings, like "evil" for "rude," "bad" for "cool," "dope" for "great." "Say, for instance, I'm walking down 135th Street. All you hear is 'Yo, Shorty. Can I get you numbah? Waz'a deal wi'choo?'—yada-yada-yada. Everybody yelling at you. Trying to talk to you. And my face: I don't smile. I'm walking. Just leave me alone. Don't bother me. That's the image I'm trying to portray. I just change. I harden myself. People don't seem to get that. They try to talk to me anyway. 'Yo, Shorty. Put a smile on yo' face, it's not that bad a day.' " She adds, "Downtown, people don't bother you." Tanasha doesn't tell her uptown friends about her speech class at Juilliard. "In a different environment, I'm dealing with a different kind of people, so I act accordingly," she says. She enjoys black vernacular and understands why it's so pervasive uptown. "We feel more unified. We have our own thing," she says. "It makes us feel stronger together—the fact that we can talk in a way that other people wouldn't understand." But she also sees the limitations of her uptown dialect. "If I only knew slang, how far could I get? I couldn't do anything but live in Harlem, be successful in Harlem. I don't think these people realize that."

In Room 312, a large, sunny rectangular rehearsal hall at Juilliard, Yasmin and Tanasha lie on their backs with their heads side by side. Tanasha's white Nikes are drawn up under her, her knees bent; Yasmin's sandalled feet, even in repose, are in second position. Along with ten other teen-age students, they are breathing deeply—or, more exactly, they are stripping away the vocal habits of their environment to find their breath and their natural voices. Their eyes are shut. The ozone around them is filled with mellifluous directions from their voice coach, Denise Woods, who is saying, "Now, breathe with your ribs. Not your chest. Not your chest. Just your ribs. So that you're really feeling the origin of this voice, which is breath."

"Spirit" has its root in the Latin for "to breathe," and the course, which is called Express Yourself!, is itself an act of inspiration. The students are learning how to give proper volume, depth, and articulation to their voices, in order to put their spirits effectively into the world. Once a week, for an entire fall or spring semester (this particular session ran from January to June), the class assembles for two hours after school to identify and to eradicate such strange-sounding chronic maladies as "wet 't's," "muddy consonants," "tone endings," and "diphthong abuse"—the miscues of pronunciation that, once the youngsters venture outside the circumscribed world of Harlem, imperceptibly chip away at their life chances. "A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live," Henry Higgins, the upper-class English professor of phonetics, says, in George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion," on first hearing Eliza Doolittle's Cockney sludge. Shaw saw speech as the bulwark of class division. "It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him," he said. Money talks, as the saying goes: a nebulous voice with poor pronunciation broadcasts impoverishment; it lacks credibility and can't be heard. So how can minorities, who grow up outside the mainstream, translate themselves into it without, like Eliza, simply mimicking the sound and manners of the dominant class?

As Yasmin, Tanasha, and the other students breathe in and expel an "s" sound up to the ceiling, they are addressing the problem. They are nearly as old as Eliza Doolittle but share nothing with her except ghettoized speech. Unlike Eliza, whose choice in static Edwardian society was to sell flowers in the gutter or sell herself through a society marriage, they are part of a mobile, multicultural America, and have ambitions to find their way on their own terms, as surgeons, engineers, lawyers, psychologists, teachers. They are members of a select group, whose intellectual ambitions have been encouraged by the Harlem Educational Activities Fund, or HEAF, a tax-exempt public charity that provides Harlem junior-high students with tutorial services and continues to bolster their progress in high school, mentoring them and arranging special trips and enrichment classes like Express Yourself!, as well as supporting them once they get to college, with a special 800 number and money to come home on holidays. The program works with eight schools, including the Asa Philip Randolph School for the Humanities (P.S. 76, on West 121st Street), which had the lowest literacy rate in the city—nine per cent—when HEAF first approached it, five years ago; that figure has since risen to twenty-one per cent. HEAF also works with Mott Hall, a "selective" public junior high, near the campus of City College, at Convent Avenue and 131st Street, which both Yasmin and Tanasha attended.

They and other gifted students have the intelligence and the ambition to move beyond their community, but they may not yet possess the vocal or presentational skills that would enable them to move comfortably between worlds. This became transparent a couple of years ago to the real-estate developer and philanthropist Daniel Rose, who is the founder and president of HEAF, while he was watching an awards ceremony for high achievers in HEAF's Support Net Program, which over the last seven years has helped several hundred students get into rigorous academic high schools and then apply to college. As the students were called to receive their plaques from General George Price, the handsome, ramrod-straight brother of the singer Leontyne Price, Rose realized that "they didn't know how to come up and get the award." He recalls, "The body language was the tentative body language of someone who didn't belong, a mixture of pride and embarrassment. I thought, Some of these kids have only a year before they're off to college. How are they going to look at their Harvard interview? I don't want anyone to put them down. I want them to feel self-confident. I want their body language to say, 'I'm here by right—not by sufferance. I'm comfortable here.' " Over dinner that evening, Rose worried aloud about the problem to Gloria Levitas, an anthropologist and the wife of Mitchel Levitas, then the editor of the *Times* Op-Ed page. She suggested acting lessons for the kids. The next day, Rose was on the phone to Joseph Polisi, the head of Juilliard, and a week later Polisi brought Denise Woods to Rose. "We met. You can't help but fall in love with her," says Rose, who gave Woods a free hand to invent a course. "She's like an actress creating her role."

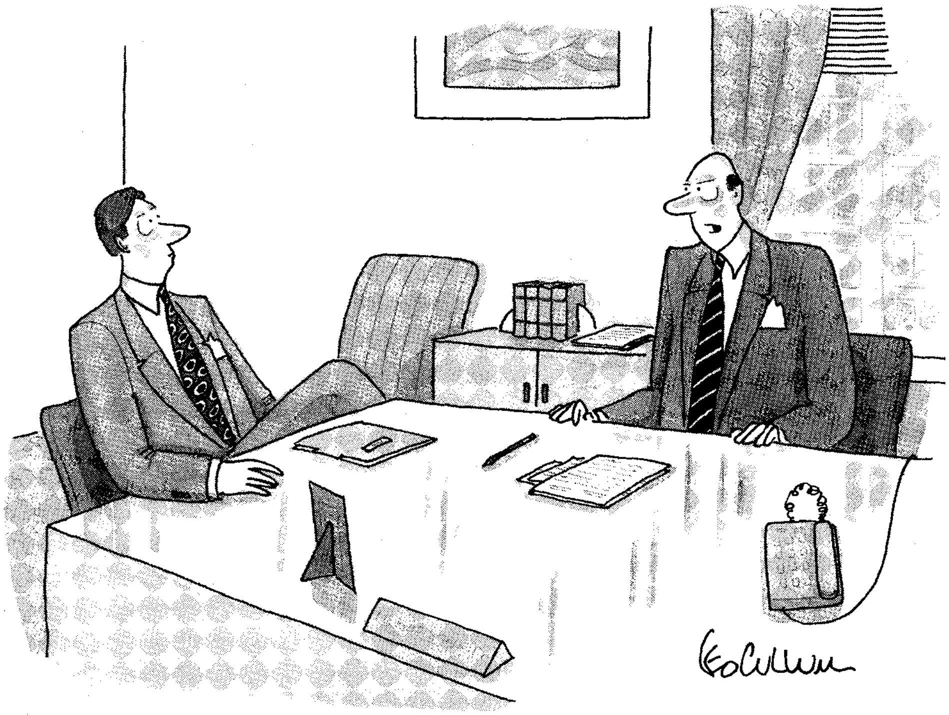
THE offer came at the right moment for Woods, a buoyant, cosmopolitan thirty-nine-year-old African-American actress and singer, who, like her students, started life as a project girl—in her case, in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood on the Lower East Side, at the foot of the Williamsburg Bridge. "I *tawked* like this *awl* the *toime*. I kid you not," says Woods, who was Miss Black Teen America in 1972, got her B.F.A. in theatre from Juilliard in 1979, and joined the voice-and-speech faculty of the Drama Division at her alma mater in 1993—the first female African-American drama instructor in Juilliard's history. "I felt that at Juilliard I was working in an ivory tower," she says. "I wanted to take what I had and give it to some black folks because, God knows, we needed it." For a while, in 1994, Woods was the speech coach for professional athletes, like Carlton Bailey, of the New York Giants, and Alex English, former star of the Denver Nuggets. "I was watching these amazing athletes, but once I heard them speak I couldn't take them seriously," she says. "I felt that they had a responsibility to be well-rounded role models. They had economic power, but they had no communication tools—the power to win people over." What defeated Woods's short-lived project with the athletes was a lack of what has made her HEAF speech class such a success: the athletes, who were already rich and famous, didn't have the will to do the work, while the kids, whose talents are still in the embryo stage, as Woods explains, "are primed for it."

When she inaugurated the class, in January, 1996, the students' presentational problems were glaring. "They didn't quite feel good enough about themselves," Woods says. "They didn't sit up, breathe, and speak. Personality was very much masked." Berthsy Ayide, Julisa Herrera, Yamilett Pichardo, Amarilis Cespedes, and Yesenia Michel talked with high, strangulated, nasal voices; Miguel Vargas, Qiuwei Chen, and Johan Yege spoke almost in whispers; Jennifer Jahorie was squeaky; Ruobing Wang was breathy, and her shyness was a formidable barrier to communication. Tanasha was all volume and attitude, and Yasmin, the group's only high-school senior, had a lot to say but said it in a monotone.

Woods's idea is not to remake her students. "Certainly you cannot sacrifice your own voice," she says, reflecting on her personal struggle to assimilate as a college student. "I came into an environment where people were truly educated, and I felt intimidated. I felt less than. I felt as if I needed to catch up. I got this wonderful hodgepodge of culture that this world-renowned place was offering me. But somehow I lost the black girl who was from the Lower East Side, who was just as important as the artist. There was no one there to tell me that this element of my being was just as important as Denise the artist." It took Woods ten years to reclaim her black identity. "I felt I couldn't bring that to the table," Woods says. "There was no place for it." Now, thirty years later, there is a place. Woods frequently tells the class, "I don't want you to take this technique and become someone else. I want you to find *you*."

Woods's class is not a charm school but a kind of laboratory for multicultural living—for inhabiting that liminal zone between cultures which increasingly defines the American cultural experience. "I'm just giving you options," Woods tells the students. "That's all. I don't want you to be stuck in one style." About Tanasha, for instance, whom she calls "a sassy mama," Woods says, "She's this girl from the 'hood. She brings all these wonderful inflections that are her, that are beautiful. That I don't want to touch, because that's Tanasha. As long as she can be understood, as long as she's audible—that's all I want." When Woods was coming of age, the prevailing image of American assimilation was "the melting pot," a distillation of all cultures into one homogeneous mass. In the intervening decades of racial dialogue, "the melting pot" has evolved into "the salad bowl," where the ingredients mix but also retain their separate qualities.

America's ethnic makeup is about seventy-five per cent European and standard-English-speaking, twelve per cent African-American, ten per cent Latino, and three per cent Asian; and mutual ignorance of the differing styles



"We've got to get rid of some people, Cosgrove. Who are the least likely to come back and shoot us?"

can compound prejudice, which impedes cross-cultural traffic. As Geneva Smitherman writes in the excellent introduction to "Black Talk" (1994), referring to the influence of African-American music and idiom, "while Black *Talk* has crossed over, Black *people* have not." In the white world, proper pronunciation and grammar are indicators of intelligence. "African-Americans don't associate those things with intelligence and it is a shock to us when they are," Marcyliena Morgan, a professor of linguistic anthropology at U.C.L.A., says. Minorities have to be more than bilingual; they have to be protean. The African-American actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith says, "When you get into mainstream culture, that culture requires a more sophisticated performance of your own ethnicity. It needs to be aesthetically more interesting."

These aesthetic refinements can be intimidating. Like a saleswoman coaxing a customer into an expensive suit that at first seems out of character, Woods tells her class, "Don't just do good speech for good speech's sake. Wear it. Put it on. See how it feels for you. It's going to fit differently for everybody." She adds, "What people see is what they think exists in the person. So you have to be very savvy at presenting the package." She is leading them toward what the cultural critic Homi Bhabha, of the University of Chicago, calls "sly civility"—a term taken from a British missionary document that described the complex negotiation of identity across cultural boundaries during English colonial rule of India. "Sly civility is a way of keeping an exchange open but also keeping the priorities of the cultural element with which you are identified as part of the game," Bhabha says. "It's a way of playing with your own pack. There's a kind of strategy by which you are continually discarding and taking up somebody else's cards. You are composing your hand. There is a game. There is an exchange. Your cards don't always remain the same. Your hand changes, but it bears some relationship to the cards which you were dealt."

EVEN as Woods steps quietly around the prostrate bodies, which are now reciting "*My oh my oh my oh my*," she is building vocal graciousness into her students' repertoire. Woods understands that in the ghetto, "to keep from being attacked you have to attack, so you get harshness." She adds, "Aesthetically, it's not inviting. When people are repelled, they don't take the time to get to know you. Why bother?"

"*My mind is my own*," Woods intones. The class echoes her. "M"s, "n"s, and "ng" sounds encourage nasal resonance, which brings the voice forward in the mouth and makes for a warmer and more welcoming sound. "I'm constantly saying, 'Invite people from another world into your world,' " Woods explains. " 'Show them how wonderful your world is.' As opposed to saying, 'I have to be like them. I'm not like them, so I won't say anything at all.' " She adds, "When you're concise and expressive, you are revealing, and in inner-city situations you don't want to reveal too much. To sit up straight, to release the jaw, means that you're vulnerable. You're receiving, giving, open. In the ghetto, you can't afford to be open, because you'll be taken advantage of. It's perceived as a weakness."

When the students first arrived in Woods's class, they pronounced most words incorrectly and therefore didn't hear the letters in them. To hear the actual sounds in words was a revelation. "The first time we spoke to Denise, and I heard her speaking, it sounded different," Berthsy Ayide says. "You leave out a lot of the sounds. All sorts of letters." Though the students were among the brightest in the New York public-school system, "they were not aware of the fact that there is a difference between 'mumfs' and 'months,' " Woods says. "They didn't know they weren't communicating." In their muddy speech, diphthongs became pure vowels: "yo" for "your"; "ma" for "my"; "caw" for "car." Difficult consonant combinations defeated them: "asks" was "ax"; "hands" was "hans"; "tastes" was "tase"; "wrists" was "wris." One of the most bedevilling sounds was the "th"—the cultural overtones of which came up during an articulation exercise, when the students struggled with words like "months" and "depths." Woods shook her head, pointing at Berthsy and Julisa. "You had no 's' and you had no 'th,' " she said. She added, "The tip of the tongue comes through the teeth. 'Health.' 'Wealth.' Yeah, bring it back like a snake." Berthsy said, "I can't do that. There's no 'th' in Spanish. They don't say diphthongs. It's '*diptongos*.' "

As Woods points out, the "th" sound is also alien to African-American speech, because it does not exist in most West African languages—West Africa

RAIN IN SIBIU

Rain in Sibiu, rain white, gray, black—the sky
an impenetrable safe.
All along our fence they bloom,
the white keepsake flowers
called in Romanian "coins of pity."
On the street a brass band parades for a wedding or maybe a funeral.

Strange—those monotonous rains—
sometimes gray, sometimes white, and even black.
There was something about them, something cheap and dreary
like the stiff body of a dog in the dew-covered grass
or the interminable grinding of the hurdy-gurdy in films about Paris.

Even now I wake up in the dead of night,
rain streaming down my shoulders
and Johan's son above me in the cold attic,
still playing desperately on his trumpet
beside his hanged father.

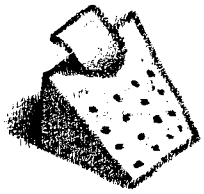
—LILIANA URSU

(*Translated, from the Romanian, by Tess Gallagher and Adam J. Sorkin.*)

being the region from which America's slave population was taken. Usage that is registered by the mainstream as a miscue—like "dis" and "dat," or "mouf" for "mouth"—is merely a phonetic variant. But these dialect differences are perceived by the dominant culture as deficits, and in the five months of the course the students will learn both how to recognize and how to remedy these blips in their performance of self.

Woods moves around the room, snapping her fingers to the rhythm of the drills—"*Many men many men many men men men*," "*Miles and miles of golden sand*"—and when she hears a tinny, strained sound from the group she stops to act out the off-putting noise for the class. "We're going to get rid of that tinny quality and give you a rich, velvety sound," Woods says. "*Many moaning men making money in the month of May.*" She sashays around the periphery of the circle of bodies. "*Time and time and time again.*" The class crisply repeats the phrase. "Yes!" Woods says, her forearm shooting up. "Not a wet 't' in the house!"

THE last half hour or so of every class is given over to group self-criticism, with the members of the class speaking texts chosen by Woods—excerpts from the 1791 autobiography of a former slave, Gustavus Vassa; Maxine Hong Kingston's "The Woman Warrior"; poetry by Maya Angelou. In these sessions, which are critical but supportive, the students see their mannerisms mirrored back at them. The effect can be sobering. "Everybody always says I have an attitude," Tanasha said at the first class I observed. "Denise said that I usually have a lot of warmth, and she didn't see that when I was speaking." When I asked what she was doing wrong, Tanasha said she didn't know. Yasmin thereupon jumped into the middle of the circle, putting her hands on her hips and one foot in front of the other. "Her neck is very stiff," Yasmin said, adopting the posture of someone loaded for bear. "So when she does speak it's just like, 'My name is Tanasha Bennett. You want to settle this outside?' "



At a June session, Qiuwei Chen, who was then a freshman at Stuyvesant High School, read an uncharacteristically neutral text about the Yangtze River. When he finished, the class dissected his performance.

"Not a lot of 'um's," Berthsy said.

"He read fast, but it was good," Tanasha said. "I heard 't's."

"Dry ones?" Woods asked.

"Yes," Tanasha said.

"I like the way he stands. He looks so relaxed. It's beautiful," Berthsy said.

"What does that tell you about the speaker?"

"He's secure, confident, knows what he's talking about," Berthsy said.

"You could afford to slow down," Woods said to Qiuwei. "Take your time. Enjoy it. Could you visualize what you were saying?"

"Yes," Qiuwei said.

"If you see it, we see it," Woods said. "If you see it, it really affects your voice. Think of yourself as an artist painting a picture for us." The conversation gradually evolved into a discussion of voice problems that are alienating. "In terms of myself, personally, monotony was the problem," Yasmin chimed in. "Disinterest can make my audience not hear what I'm saying." Now, she said, she put punctuation—specifically, commas—into her thoughts. "I have an 'up' in my speech—the upward inflection that leaves you waiting."

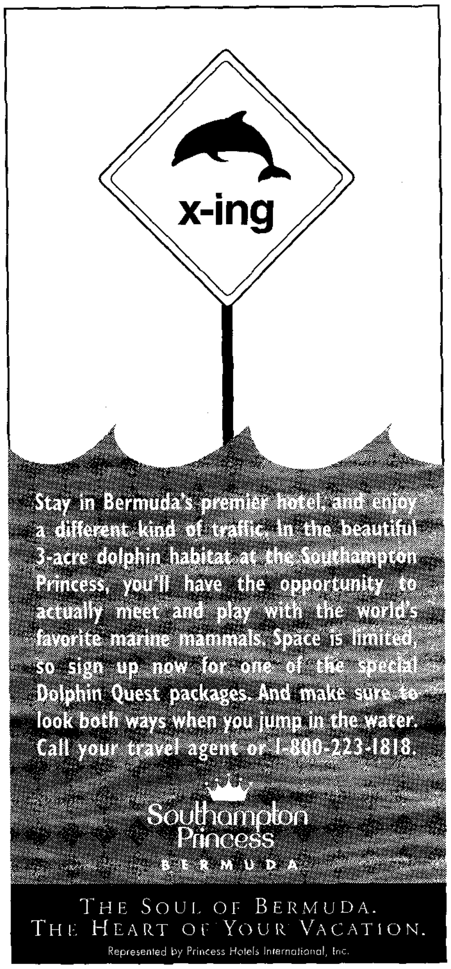
According to Woods, what changed Yasmin's expressiveness was her breathing. "When she didn't breathe deeply, her talk got very fragmented," Woods said. "She was constantly, um, looking, um, for the thought. She wouldn't look you in the eye. Breath is the transition from one thought to the next. When you don't get it, it stifles the natural flow of thought." And proper breathing leads to proper posture. "You're absolutely erect, because you have no choice," Woods said.

Johan Yege, who was slumped in his seat, said, "I guess when you sit like this you can't take a deep breaf."

"A deep what?" Woods said.

"A deep brea*th*."

ON a sunny day in June, Woods packed me into her red Toyota Corolla to go uptown for a lunch of chicken and ribs at Sylvia's, Harlem's most famous eatery. The person behind the restaurant is Sylvia Woods, who happens to be Denise's aunt. In the



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"Anyone seen my saxophone pin?"

• •

mid-sixties, she bought out the owner of what was then a luncheonette, after working there as a waitress for a few years. She now owns half the city block on Lenox Avenue between 126th and 127th Streets, where she also markets her sauces and franchises her food. Since Denise Woods's childhood, when she and her mother came uptown every Sunday to what she calls "the sanctified, glorifyin', shoutin' Metropolitan Baptist Church," she has been shuttling between her downtown life and this uptown domain, which includes Strivers' Row, Langston Hughes Place, and the Hotel Theresa, on 125th Street, where Castro and his cadre of revolutionaries camped out in the early sixties before seizing power, and where HEAF's quiet revolution now has its headquarters. On a nearby street corner, as we waited for the light to change, a posse of teen-agers lumbered past Woods's car, dressed in baggy, low-slung trousers and oversized T-shirts. The shoelaces of their sneakers were untied. "Their walk is purely a result of their dress code," Woods said. "It's a jail style that's been taken into the streets. My son, Terry, wants to dress like that. I say, 'You are not. You are not emulating inmates in a prison because they're not allowed to have shoelaces or to wear belts, so their pants fall down.' "

These days, Woods comes uptown every Saturday, so that Terry, who is nine, can play baseball in the Harlem Little League, on a stony, improbable ball field at 120th Street and Eighth Avenue. "I just feel this incentive to bring him here," she says. "He has to see. He *has* to. You've gotta figure out a way, in your own way, to help change it." Terry and his mother live comfortably in midtown. "He was starting not to like himself," Woods says. "I knew it was time for him to have more interaction with black kids. Now he wants the dreadlock look, and he's tired of speaking well. He wants to be cool, and he just doesn't think it's cool to speak as well as he speaks."

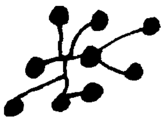
Recently, Woods's cousins, who help run Sylvia's and do a lot of catering downtown, came to her for speech lessons. She didn't, however, suggest voice work for her famous aunt, who is from South Carolina and is in her seventies. "I told her, 'Aunt Sylvia, don't change a bit,' " Woods says. " 'It's the raw quality that people like, the fact that we feel like we're in your living room.' " As the ribs and macaroni were brought to our table, Woods asked a Socratic question: "Why would I advise Aunt Sylvia *not* to change?" The answer was simple: Sylvia had made her fortune and her name on her own terms. She didn't need access to the white world, which in any case came to her in Harlem literally by the busload. It's a different matter, however, when you cross over into other cultures, Woods points out. "You've got to have everything—speech, dress code, walk—intact, because you're prejudged before you open your mouth. You've got to be able to compete."

"I GET told a lot in Harlem that I don't sound like I'm from Harlem, that I don't behave like I'm from Harlem," Yasmin says. "I'm supposed to speak in broken sentences. I'm supposed to be lucky if I graduate from high school." She goes on, "I've been told, 'You sound white.' 'You're trying to act white.' And I say, 'O.K., well, 'cause I'm getting my education and using what I'm learning, am I being white?' I try to tell them, 'Look, what I'm trying to do is excel.' " Yasmin's strong voice is at once an accomplishment and a problem. As the director George C. Wolfe says, "What you have to do is to transform that energy of defiance into an energy which is not in defiance of someone but is in essence in celebration of oneself." Wolfe, who grew up in a very supportive black community in Kentucky, became what he calls "an integration soldier." Yasmin unveils her good speech for the same reason. "I want you to hear me," she tells the ghetto kids who say she speaks funny. "I tell them, 'Well, I was taking a couple of classes at Juilliard and I tend to use the grammar I learn in my classes.' I tell them why it is I'm speaking this way. I want them to pick up on it and maybe want to use it."

Yasmin thinks of herself as "a pioneer" of Dominican culture, and her small, cluttered bedroom on the thirteenth floor of a building at 135th Street and Broadway, where her forty-two-year-old single mother, Josefina, raises Yasmin and her two younger brothers on thirteen thousand dollars a year, is filled with mottoes to reinforce a pathfinder's tenacity. "Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do," a sign above Yasmin's bed reads. A version of "The Serenity Prayer" is wedged among Alvin Ailey posters and framed family photographs: "Lord, Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, The courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to hide the bodies of those people I had to kill because they piss me off."

Yasmin attributes her independent spirit to her mother's example. Until Josefina was laid off and had to go on public assistance, she was a seamstress, who made bathing suits. "She never, ever wanted to depend on the government, so she went back to school," Yasmin says. (Josefina graduated last June from Boricua College, with a bachelor's degree in education.) According to Yasmin, her mother "didn't have a childhood. She was hit for no reason and she felt very oppressed. She had very little freedom." Yasmin adds, "One thing that's very common in the Latino community is that children have no voice. There's a saying 'Kids talk when chickens piss.' My attitude when I'd get those sayings was 'Yeah, well, talk to my mother. My mother says I have a voice in my house.' "

Yasmin also has a voice outside her house, and no compunction about using it. Not long ago, at a party given by her aunt, she found herself interceding in a fracas between her little brother Juan and a bully, who had popped Juan's balloons. The bully was related to one of the hulking teen-agers who instantly surrounded Yasmin when she tried to sort out the trouble. As Yasmin tells it, "All these big guys came around and they were like 'Do you have a problem?' " Then she heard herself saying, "I have *no* problem dealing with you guys, because I'm so sick and tired of you guys standing on the corner, swearing to God that you own the streets, when all you own is the clothes on your back. And half the time they're all borrowed from each other." She coolly took her brother's hand and walked through the circle of teen-agers, who parted to let her pass. Later, Yasmin's cousin heard one of the teen-agers say, "We gonna have to get to her, hurt her." The cousin turned and said, "Yo, that's my cousin Yasmin. Don't mess with her. She's smart. She's going to college. You don't know what she's capable of. She'll make you feel like a mouse.' " Yasmin adds, "I was kind of laughing at this. It made me feel great, because it was just like, 'Surprise! I didn't come from an eight-thousand-dollar-a-month apartment to speak like this. I live right down the street from you.' "



"SO who am I?" Yasmin asked in a speech last June at Mott Hall. Yasmin is a bit of a legend at the school: she expected to be asked to speak at its graduation ceremony, and that was why she had originally enrolled in Express Yourself! "I wanted to be proud of myself at that graduation," she says. From the age of twelve, when Yasmin began travelling downtown to dance at the D'Amboise school, her friends were mostly from downtown. She felt "like the theme song from 'The Jeffersons'—'We're movin' on up, To the East Side, To a deluxe apartment in the sky,' " she says. "I was movin' up." In those days, she was embarrassed by her origins. "People used to ask me what I was," she says. "I'd say, 'Well, guess.' Whatever they said, I'd say, O.K., yeah, that was it." But now that she has the wherewithal to assimilate she plans to return to Harlem after college. "My family's rich in their culture," she says. "So my connection to them in some way doesn't allow me to leave it." On a writing desk in her bedroom, protected by a pink plastic folder, is a book called "El Album"—a collection of stories, poems, and essays about the Dominican revolution which has been in her family since 1906. On a compact disk in the living room is "El Tamarindo," a merengue about tamarind juice, which Yasmin sings and translates for me: "Do you want tamarind juice? It's served this weekend. Go ahead, ask for it, And I'll give it to you, 'Cause when I'm in love I'm easy that way." She adds, "No matter how oppressed your conditions, you can't be sad when you have this type of music." What oppresses Yasmin these days is her old self. As she told the Mott Hall students:

> I was so anxious to assimilate, to blend in, that I started to forget who I was. Suddenly I was listening to Pearl Jam instead of Kinito Mendez and trying to shop at J. Crew. There's nothing wrong with listening to Pearl Jam and wanting to wear J. Crew. It was just when that was *all* I wanted to do it became a problem. I just felt it wasn't cool to be a poor Latina girl

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VILLE ET VILLAGE

from Harlem. It was better to mosh than to merengue and to be able to go to a country home on the weekends. I almost forgot who I was and where I came from, and it's important not to do that. Remember, you come from beautifully vibrant cultures filled with rich music and traditions. Share that. Enlighten others with *your* history. . . . Try new things but don't forget the old. . . . Remember who you are.

TANASHA, however, wants to leave some parts of her culture behind. She has only one thing on her mind: "Trying to get out of this area." Last spring, her area—151st Street between Amsterdam and Broadway—was pictured in the *Daily News:* all the Dominican drug dealers on her street were lying face down in a police drug bust. For a while after that, the street was sealed tight; even gypsy-cab drivers had to show a pass to enter. "If you've never been to the ghetto, don't come to the ghetto," Tanasha says, taking me past the Carmansville Playground, known to the locals as the Battlegrounds. "The people here are not happy people. They get up in the morning and sit outside. They'll be there all day."

Tanasha lives on the fourth floor in a railroad flat that has three locks on the door and a doormat bearing the legend "Some days you step in it, Some days you don't." Until a year ago, she and her two sisters and her brother lived with her mother and stepfather in a three-room apartment on the first floor, where all four kids slept in one room. (Her father, who works as a cook, lives in Brooklyn.) Tanasha's mother didn't let her out of the house unsupervised until she was nine. "Even now, I hate the neighborhood," says Tracy Bennett, who has a job with the city, tracking lead-paint violations. "If you go outside, don't go outside just to stand around." The entropy of uptown aimlessness terrifies Tanasha, and she is perpetually restless. "They used to call me Energizer Bunny, because I have to move, I just have to go somewhere," Tanasha says. "It's sickening just to stay still and just to be still. To sit out there and see nothing. Stable in their nothingness. That's what they're doing. Sitting around in the nothingness doing nothing." She adds, "People downtown have a destination, and that kind of changes everything." She likes to do her homework on the subway and to come home with her schoolbooks. "I love looking studious and, around here, looking like I'm going somewhere or I'm doing something," she says.

Tanasha wants to be an actress or a lawyer or a social scientist or "a doctor in something, or whatever." She says, "I don't have any idea what I'll be. Just something successful." She goes on, "I haven't accomplished anything that I think would make me happy. High-school graduation will be a step. College acceptance will be a step. The fact that I know I'm leaving here." Tanasha now has her own room, which is tiny but has one distinctive feature: its walls are covered with different printed versions of her name. "I love my name," she says. "Tanasha Nakia Bennett." She adds, "I like to be different, like things that make me different." This year, she has acquired a taste for classical music and for Shakespeare. "I'm always making up daydreams," she says. She dreams of the houses on Convent Avenue and Riverside Drive. "I've always wanted to live in one of them, since I was little," she says. "I would love to live in a house with stairs."

Speech class is a key part of her one-woman urban-renewal program. Recently, on the subway, Tanasha was complimented by an African-American straphanger on how well she spoke. "I love attention," she says. "I can get more attention, in a sense, with my speech. If I learn it, I'll be able to speak my street slang, be my proper self, and then take it all the way to the next level of speaking—incredibly proper. That'd be just so beautiful to me. I could go into a store like Saks Fifth Avenue, and they'd probably think I was crazy, that I was from London or something. That would put a kind of class on me."

AT Juilliard the next day, Tanasha recited a Maya Angelou poem called "Still I Rise." "Can I have an audience, please?" she said, calling the group to attention. Woods had taped Tanasha reading the poem on the first day of class; now, in the penultimate lesson of the term, she put a tape recorder on the lectern over which Tanasha was anxiously leaning. She began to read:

> Does my sassiness upset you?
> Why are you beset with gloom?
> 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
> Pumping in my living room.

By the time the poem reached the finale, with its thumping gospel rhythms, the class was transfixed. "I rise," Tanasha intoned,

> Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
> I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
> I rise
> I rise
> I rise.

Everyone in the room, including me, burst into applause. "O.K., now the real moment," Woods said, and she turned on the recording of Tanasha's first stab at the poem. Her voice was slurred, inarticulate, and without variety, and the ends of consonants were lost. The class laughed. "I sound like a project girl," Tanasha said. Then Woods played back the rendition we'd just heard. The room was spellbound. Tanasha's voice was crisp, clear, and resonant; its confident power came from a different place in her throat. As we listened, Woods's right hand cupped her mouth. Berthsy Ayide flicked a tear from her eye. At the end, there was another volley of applause. Tanasha, uncharacteristically, bolted to the back of the room and turned her back to the class. Her body was juddering.

"Well, Tanasha, what do you think?" Woods asked.

Tanasha turned to face the group. She was laughing. "Oh, my goodness. So much better," she said. "I didn't know I sounded like that." Woods asked if she could hear the difference. "Yes," Tanasha said. "Oh, my goodness."

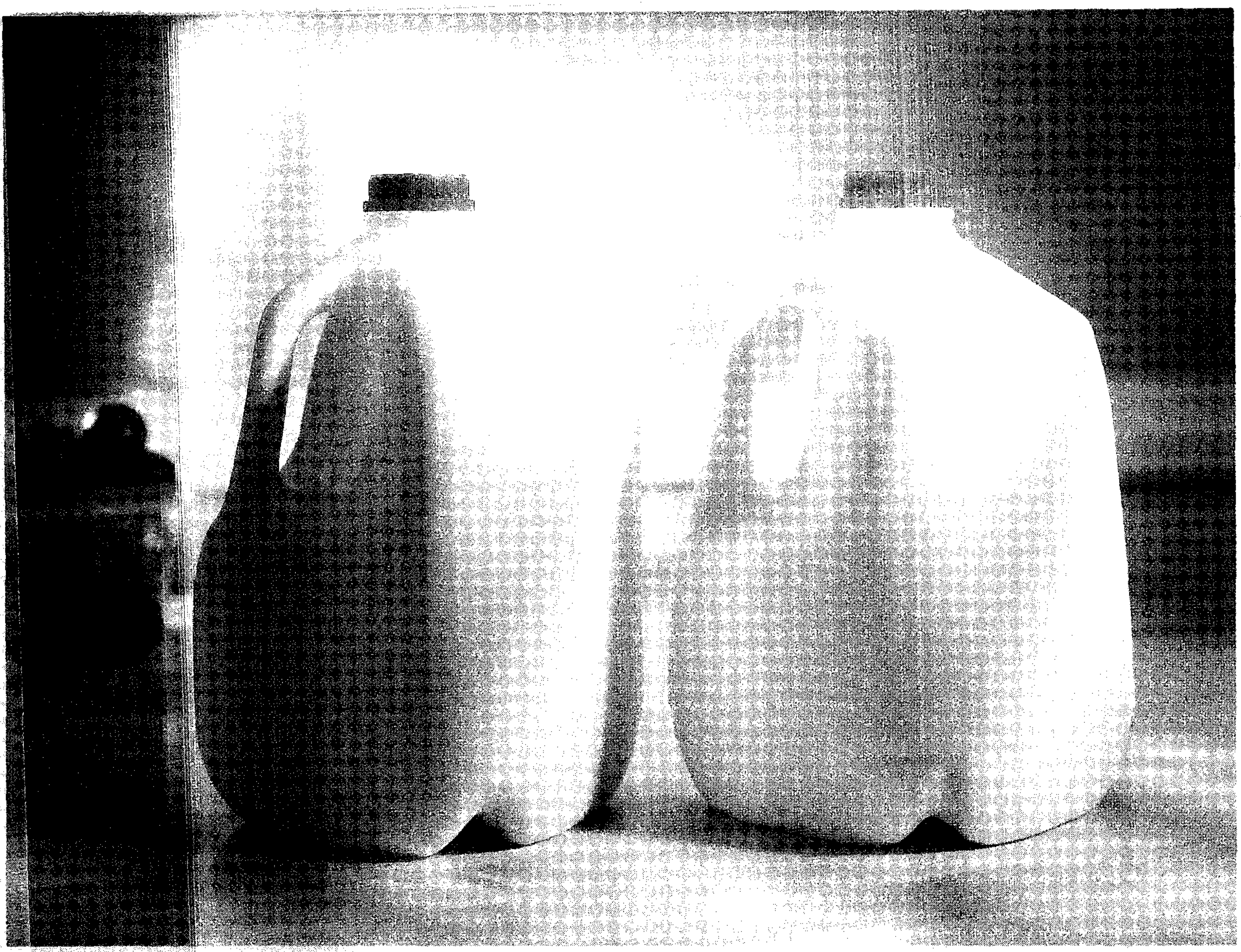
At the end of class, Tanasha came up to Woods and asked for a copy of the tape. "I want to show my mother," Tanasha said. "She didn't hear any change."

"It's like my son," Woods said. "He's growing every day. I don't see it, but other people do." She handed Tanasha the tape. "Thank you," Tanasha said quietly; she scuttled out of the rehearsal room. Woods watched the door close behind her. "The birth of a voice," she said. "You can just see the chick cracking through the egg." ♦

WISHFUL THINKING DEPARTMENT

[*From the Times*]

Because of a telephone dictation error, an article yesterday about Representative Newt Gingrich's campaign to retain his post as Speaker misstated the Republican response to Representative Matt Salmon's suggestion that Mr. Gingrich step aside. Mr. Salmon was jeered, not cheered.



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ANNALS OF SPACE

IS THIS THE END?

It's very unlikely that a major comet will crash into the Earth—but not so unlikely that leading scientists around the world haven't begun to plot ways to make sure it doesn't happen.

BY TIMOTHY FERRIS

I—DEATH FROM ABOVE

IF the world were to end with what astronomers call "death from above," the first clue might come with the discovery—late tonight, let's say—of a distant fuzzball swimming against a field of stars. The observer might be an amateur astronomer, one among the hundreds who patrol the skies with telescopes and giant binoculars, hoping to be the first to see a new comet, which will thereafter bear its discoverer's name. Having spotted the fuzzball and found nothing corresponding to it on the star charts, the observer waits to see if it moves. In this case, that might take a few nights. The comet is big, and therefore bright, it has been spotted farther out than one might expect, and that makes its motion harder to detect. Also, it's headed our way.

Yet even a comet heading our way shows some motion in the sky, and once the discoverer has found a change in the comet's position he sends an E-mail describing it to Brian Marsden. Marsden is a sunny, plumpish astronomer with snow-white hair and the bright-eyed enthusiasm of a man who solves puzzles for a living. From a small, cluttered office at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he runs the International Astronomical Union's Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, which spreads news of newly discovered comets and asteroids to interested parties all over the planet.

Comets are chunks of ice and black rock left over from the formation of the solar system. Most lie far from the sun, but a few occasionally hurtle down into the inner solar system, like starlings startled from the rafters of a barn. Asteroids are minor planets, some made of stones similar to those found in Earth's crust, others of metals like those at Earth's core. Most inhabit the asteroid belt between Jupiter and Mars, but thousands are closer, in orbits that cross Earth's. For nearly thirty years, Marsden has watched them come and go, and has heralded their arrivals like a butler announcing guests at a ball.

Marsden is said to be the world's master at computing orbits from preliminary data, and what he wants to know about this comet, as about all others, is where it's going. On learning of each new comet, he says to himself, "Yes, this one could hit the Earth. That's always a possibility." He enters the positions of the latest one into his computer, adds the command "ORBDET," for "determine orbit," and hits a key. A string of numbers cascades down the big, flat-screen color monitor. Marsden knows better than to put much faith in an orbit derived from just a few initial observations. Still, this one is interesting. The results suggest that this is a long-period comet—one that's been falling toward the sun for aeons, accelerating all the while—and that it may come close to Earth's orbit. That could make it a pretty sight—a rival, perhaps, to last spring's splendid Comet Hyakutake. Marsden dispatches a "telegram"—nowadays, usually an E-mail message—to the bureau's subscribers, who number some seven hundred.

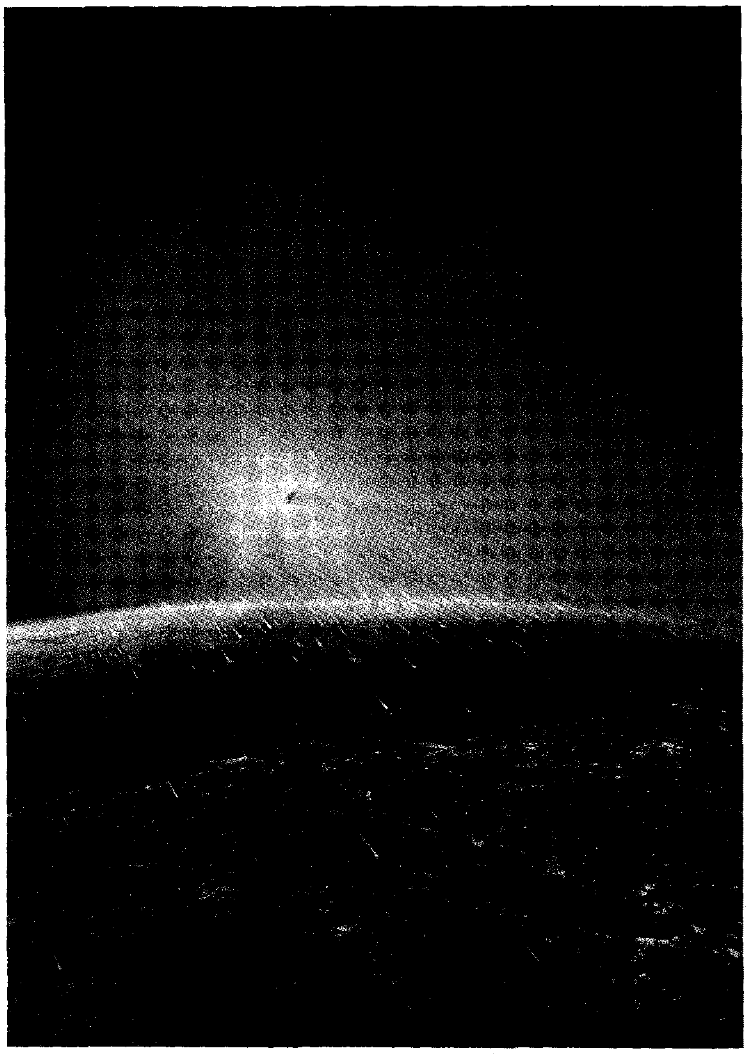
In the next few nights, dozens of observers take time out from their other duties to have a look. They range from professional astronomers in mountaintop observatories to amateurs with light-sensitive imaging devices that link their back-yard telescopes to laptop computers. Fresh, more accurate positions and brightness measurements are obtained and forwarded to Marsden. He enters them, types "ORBDET," and sees that it's a big, bright comet, all right. It will enter the inner solar system on the far side of the sun—not much of a show there—but should then come close enough to Earth, on the outbound leg of its journey, to be visible to the naked eye, its ghostly tail stretching across the sky. It might conceivably threaten us, but that is highly unlikely. Marsden goes on to compose the new data into another E-mail telegram.

MINUTES later, Marsden's message shows up on the computer in Paul Chodas's office, at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, near Pasadena, California. Chodas, too, is an affable man, his career the realization of a boyhood dream. Born in London, Ontario, he grew up knowing exactly what he wanted to do: applied mathematics—specifically, calculating orbits at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Administered jointly by NASA and Caltech, J.P.L. houses banks of computers linked to radio dishes in Robledo de Chavela, Spain, in the Mojave Desert, and in Tidbinbilla, Australia, through which it guides interplanetary spacecraft. It does this very well. J.P.L.'s controllers have maneuvered radar-mapping orbiters above cloud-covered Venus, landed instrumented probes on the surface of Mars within only a few miles of their intended destinations, and flown spacecraft past the outer planets within seconds of target times set months in advance. Working out orbits at J.P.L. is the modern equivalent of mapping ocean voyages with Prince Henry the Navigator at Sagres. Chodas enters the numbers for Marsden's latest comet into his computer and asks it to calculate the possibility of an Earth impact. Then he blinks. The probability that it will hit is small but not zero. He pulls up a graphic display, called Position Uncertainty. It renders Earth as a skeletal sphere made up of latitude and longitude lines, the impact probability as a long, pencil-thin ellipse. Based on the available data, the most likely point of the comet's closest approach to Earth is a dot at the center of the ellipse. The rest of the ellipse represents other plausible trajectories for the comet—these based on the uncertainties in calculating its orbit.

Earth isn't on the dot, but it isn't entirely outside the ellipse, either. It sits toward one end of the ellipse, with fully a third of the globe intersecting it. The conclusions are no better than the data, of course, but as a matter of calculation there's no mistake. Evidently, there is some chance that the comet will hit us.

Now the E-mail messages multiply exponentially, fanning out among observatories, universities, and space-agency personnel. Astrophysicists who study colliding galaxies at the edge of the universe are elbowed aside by lowly solar-system researchers eager to determine more accurate positions for the new comet. The Hubble Space Telescope and dozens of other satellites silently slew their sensors to point toward the same patch of sky. As the data flow back to Marsden's and Chodas's computers, Earth edges out of the target ellipse, then into it again, then slowly migrates toward its center. If the calculations are correct, the comet will pass closest to Earth on its outbound leg—after having passed quite near the sun—ninety-one days hence. The estimated odds of impact are up to sixteen per cent. The newspapers learn of the story, for by now it has circulated so widely in the scientific community that anybody wanting to keep it secret would find the task as difficult as putting evaporated cologne back into its bottle, and Chodas's ellipse shows up on front pages all over the world.

History having provided us with no example of how societies would react were practically everybody to learn that civilization might come to an end in three months' time, we are left with speculation as to what would ensue. Would mass transit freeze as its operators went home, the stock market collapse as investors liquidated their holdings and repaired to Tahiti, banks fail as depositors withdrew their lives' savings and spent them on survival rations or vodka and caviar? Would the streets fill with throngs of millennialists and flagellants, chanting Biblical verses or lines of secular verse like Ezra Pound's "Pull down thy vanity / Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail"? Or would affairs go on much as before, although with brushfires of bizarre behavior and at a certain, shall we say, elevated anxiety level?



Scattered enclaves of humans may survive a major comet impact, but human civilization almost certainly will not.

DON DAVIS

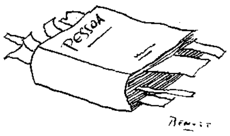
The greatest genuine source of anxiety, as optimists and pessimists alike could be expected to proclaim on the op-ed pages, would be that for most of this time we wouldn't know for sure whether the comet was going to hit. Such uncertainty arises for two main reasons. One has to do with the errors inherent in determining the orbit of any object that has been newly discovered. Its exact position is difficult to ascertain, partly because the plotted positions of the background stars contain residual errors; its trajectory becomes better determined the longer it can be followed. In addition, as a comet approaches the sun and warms up, gases in its ice expand and burst out as geysers and jets. The jets push the comet around, slightly altering its velocity and its vector. The comet's vicissitudes complicate matters considerably, leading to an agonizing situation in which, as astronomers anxiously chart each stagger in the comet's progress, nobody can know until a couple of weeks beforehand whether impact will occur.

By the time the comet passes through the plane of Earth's orbit on its inbound leg, it makes an arresting appearance through binoculars, with its tail of ionized gas sweeping away from the sun in a gentle curve. Weeks later, it ducks inside the orbit of the planet Mercury and vanishes in the glare of the sun. Agonizing days of ignorance pass, and then NASA risks turning the Hubble Space Telescope into a solar oven by aiming it closer to the sun than its safety protocols would normally permit. It acquires a set of images of the comet as it sails out, preceded by its now enormous tail. The news is not good: impact appears more likely than ever.

The next weeks are a time of evaporating hope, as Paul Chodas's now familiar impact ellipses in the newspapers shrink until constrained to a swath of the North Atlantic. The ellipse defines a tube of space through which the comet is almost certain to pass. We're not there yet: Earth orbits the sun at a velocity of sixty-six thousand five hundred miles an hour, and a week beforehand our rendezvous point still lies more than ten million miles away. But we're going to get there, and so is the comet.

In the last days, the comet dominates the sky as it does a billion nightmares. Its nucleus is bright enough to stand out in broad daylight, and by night its foggy milk-white nucleus and bridal-veil tail make for one of the prettiest things humans have ever seen in the sky, and one of the last. On the final night, debris blown off the comet as it passed near the sun starts striking Earth. Fireballs light up the sky. A meteorite punches a hole in an apartment house in Morocco. Another sets fire to oak trees in Anatolia.

The comet hits near Bermuda just before dawn Eastern time. The explosion vaporizes an enormous sphere of air, seawater, and soil, cutting a crater a hundred miles in diameter in the ocean floor. This makes a thunderclap that rolls through Philadelphia and New York a little over an hour later and will thereafter be heard, rather more faintly, in London, Moscow, Rio, and Tokyo. The impact's splash arrives at the East Coast not far behind the sound. In the deep sea, where it has plenty of room to expand, this mighty wave soon settles to a height of only fifty feet or so—a long, gentle swell moving inconspicuously but rapidly outward at a velocity of more than five hundred miles an hour. But tsunamis grow when water gets shallow. This one stacks up over the Grand Banks, then hits Manhattan at sunrise at a height of six hundred feet. Florida has already gone under. Before the day is out, most of Earth's low-lying regions have been submerged, from Edinburgh, Copenhagen, and Dublin to Hong Kong and Bangkok.



Yet, in the final accounting, water creates only tertiary damage. A greater threat is fire. The conflagration begins within the hour, as a spectacular meteor shower best seen from Asia, where it is evening. Clumps of debris thrown into space by the exploding comet have been launched in all directions, like fleets of ICBMs, and now they descend, filling the night with fireballs. Many expire in the atmosphere, but millions hit, igniting forests, villages, and cities. Soon the world is ablaze, and the air turns black with soot.

The soot, along with tons of talc-like dust pumped into the air by the explosion, clouds the atmosphere and blots out the sun for a period ranging from six months to a year, and it is this blackness—along with an acid rain comprising sulfur dioxide and toxic metals—that proves to be the impact's most lethal agency. In a world gone dark that long, most plant life expires, as do marine creatures that dwell near the surface, and their loss, in turn, dooms the creatures that rely on them for food. The pattern of extinction shows a preference for the more complex organisms, which are most reliant on the support of multiple elements in the food chain. Human beings are complex organisms; their problem will be what to eat. With the world's food surpluses amounting, typically, to less than a year's supply, people who manage to survive the initial blast, floods, and fires will find themselves confronting starvation.

Among the dire possibilities brought forth by those who consider such things is the prospect that nuclear-armed nations with little remaining food might try to blackmail those with somewhat more food. In the over-all scheme of things, however, it doesn't matter much whether nuclear violence writes a final chapter to the general catastrophe. Scattered enclaves of humans might survive a major comet impact, but human civilization almost certainly would not.

II—A DANGEROUS PLACE

"COMETS are vile stars," Li Ch'un Feng wrote, in the seventh century A.D. "Every time they appear . . . something happens to wipe out the old and establish the new." To let one example stand for many, consider the great comet of 1680, moving like a ghost ship across the night sky, the sight of which occasioned expressions of hysteria. The theologian Christopher Ness warned that God had dispatched the comet as "a Sign from Heaven" that "signifies Drought, and portends War," and in Holland the philosopher Pierre Bayle complained that he was beset by the inquiries of terrified believers who saw the comet as a sign "to give Sinners time to prevent by Repentance the Evils which hung over their Heads." But Edmond Halley saw it, too, from a ship on the English Channel, and when he reached France he met with the astronomer Jean-Dominique Cassini, and Cassini acquainted him with the idea—proved by Isaac Newton, in his "Principia"—that comets are interplanetary objects following predictable orbits, not missiles hurled without warning by God, and that, indeed, several of the comets recorded in the annals of history might be recurring visits of the same comet. Halley confirmed this in 1705 by computing the orbit of the comet that has ever since borne his name and predicting that it would return in 1758 (as it did, sixteen years after his death).

For this and other historical reasons, comets came to symbolize the distinction between the scientific-minded, who understood them to be peaceful plodders, and the ignorant and superstitious, who continued to shrink from them as portents of doom. (One of the few empiricists skeptical enough to have doubts on this score was Voltaire, who in 1738 noted in his "Elements of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy," a popular account of Newtonian mechanics, "What a Disaster would it be for our Earth, if unhappily she should find herself in the same Point [as a comet]? The Idea of two Bombs, which burst on clashing together in the Air, is infinitely below what we ought to have of such an encounter as this.")

When the first scientific academies were founded in France and England, in the seventeenth century, they were fervently concerned with differentiating empirically verifiable fact from superstition. Reports of stones falling from the sky—coming, as they did, from folklore, ancient books, and the eyewitness accounts of the uneducated—were consigned to the realm of superstition. As the astronomer John Lewis notes, in his authoritative book "Rain of Iron and Ice," scientists of the day fell into the trap of assuming that "anything that was not already understood in physical terms must be superstitious nonsense."

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the extraterrestrial origin of meteorites had begun to gain acceptance among scientists, partly because the high nickel content of metal-rich meteorites distinguished them from the rocks indigenous to the regions in which they were found, and partly as a result of an imposing fall of more than two thousand stones in L'Aigle, Normandy, on April 23, 1803. That fall was investigated on behalf of the French Academy of Sciences by the great solar-system researcher Pierre-Simon Laplace, and the evidence persuaded him that the stones must have come from space. Even so, the notion that big stones hit occasionally, doing major damage, remained a hard sell. Geologists attributed the craters of the Moon to volcanoes, and craters on Earth likewise.

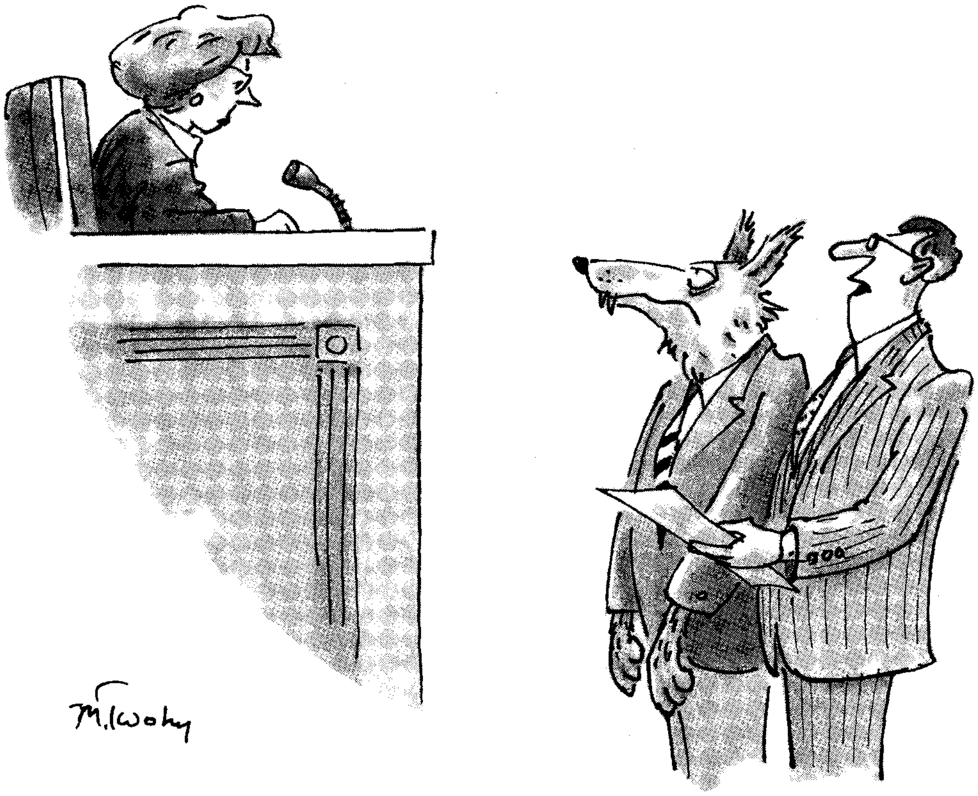
Meteor Crater, a kilometre-wide hole in the desert near Winslow, Arizona, was only belatedly, after about 1929, recognized to be the work of a meteorite—one that hit some fifty thousand years ago. Meteor Crater was the first impact site on Earth to be recognized as such. Other identifications followed. Typical was the case of Manicouagan, Quebec, a hundred-kilometre ring where two lakes have been back-flooded by a hydroelectric dam. It remained unrecognized from the ground as a twelve-million-year-old impact crater, but its status was established through aerial photography, and it leaped out to the eye when it was viewed from orbit by astronauts and cosmonauts. More than a hundred and fifty terrestrial-impact craters have been identified to date, some of them in unexpectedly placid and settled places: the elegant manor house at Rochechouart, in the Vienne Valley of central France, is built of fragments of impact-breccia rock, which were melted together by an exploding meteorite a hundred and eighty-six million years ago and found in a crater twenty-three kilometres in diameter.

Yet the realization that impacts are ubiquitous in the solar system was slow to dawn. Not until the nineteen-seventies and eighties, when the Mariner spacecraft returned images of the pockmarked surfaces of Mars and Mercury and the Voyager mission to the outer planets took detailed pictures showing thousands of overlapping craters on satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, did scientists come to appreciate that the solar system's topography resembles that of an artillery range. Indeed, so extensive has meteor traffic been among the planets, with pieces coming to rest on Earth which had been knocked off the Moon, and Mars, and perhaps even Mercury, that if life is found on Mars it may prove to be identical to life on Earth, thanks to primitive microörganisms' having long ago been ferried from Mars to Earth, or vice versa. Earth's relatively crater-free surface is the result of erosion: were it not for wind, rain, and geological upheavals Earth would look as pockmarked as the Moon.

From decades of such reconnaissance has emerged a new and more sophisticated picture of the solar system as a unified entity with a common history. In this new picture, the planets owe their very existence to impacts. They are thought to have formed through the collisions of "planetesimals"—mile-wide objects, themselves built up from the dust grains and beachball-size clumps of material that orbited the infant sun in the early days. Earth, when young, was evidently hit by something as massive as Mars; the crash created a huge, molten splash of mostly surface material, and that material coalesced to form the Moon. The Moon itself bears the scar of at least one nearly catastrophic impact, in the form of a gigantic ringed crater, Mare Orientale, an ash-gray bull's-eye bigger than Sri Lanka. (Mare Orientale happens to point ninety degrees away from the Earth, so it remained undiscovered until it was photographed by lunar space probes. Had the Moon locked gravitationally to Earth a quarter of a turn later, so that Mare Orientale permanently faced us, we would have evolved looking not at the Man in the Moon but at a big, staring eye. How might that apparition have influenced the course of human history?) Eventually, the surviving planets emerged, having swept their orbits clear of everything massive enough to destroy them.

There were, however, lots of pieces left over, and the great majority of these survivors are the comets. There are estimated to be a trillion of them, most of which belong to the Oort cloud. Named after Jan Oort, the Dutch astronomer who, just after the Second World War, first theorized its existence, the Oort cloud consists of a thick shell, centered on the sun, that starts beyond the orbit of Pluto, the outermost planet, and extends perhaps two light-years into space, or halfway to the nearest star. Its comets remain serenely aloof, plodding, like tethered oxen, through immense orbits around the distant sun. But from time to time something—a passing star or cloud of gas, perhaps—knocks a bunch of comets out of orbit. Some climb to higher orbits, or escape the sun's gravitational field forever. Others head toward the inner solar system. For a comet to fall from its perch in the Oort cloud down to Earth's orbit can take a million years. Another, less populous school of comets swims closer to home, in a disk-shaped array called the Kuiper Belt (after Gerard Kuiper, of Yerkes Observatory).

The largest Kuiper Belt comet yet observed, a two-hundred-kilometre-wide iceball called Chiron, pursues an unstable orbit that carries it inside the orbit of Uranus. Nobody yet knows how many Kuiper Belt icebergs exist, or how big they get. Some astronomers suggest that Pluto,



"He's sorry, Your Honor, and he's decided to devote himself to making a difference in pigs' lives."

SEVENTY-ONE

"Your mother must have a hidden agenda, the way she gave you those extra cookies."

• •

which is icy, and is smaller than Earth's moon, and has an eccentric orbit, is not a planet at all but a Kuiper Belt object.

As comets travel through the inner solar system, they leave behind snail trails of rocks and gravel. Earth encounters scores of comet trails every year, whereupon the debris, making a fiery entry into the atmosphere, produces what is known as a periodic meteor shower. During a meteor shower, if you stay up past midnight, when the night sky is on the bow side of Earth's orbital motion, you may see twenty to thirty meteors an hour. Occasionally, a rich shower will hurl down "shooting stars" faster than you can count them. The Leonid shower, which has generated spectacular fireworks at intervals of about a third of a century, is expected to peak again on about November 18, 1999, just in time to set off millennialist alarms. Each shower is a reminder that a comet once passed through here, and would have hit us had its timing been less fortunate.

The inner solar system also contains millions of asteroids, of which fewer than one per cent have been located. An estimated half-million asteroids measuring a hundred metres or more in diameter pursue orbits that bring them close to Earth. One of the smaller and more numerous of these could smash every structure within three hundred miles of its impact site. A collision with one of the two thousand or so known larger ones, each the size of a small town, could wind back the clock of human civilization to the time of Vlad the Impaler.

The realization that what we don't know can hit us began to gain strength in 1980, when the physicist Luis Alvarez; his geologist son, Walter; and a few of their colleagues at Berkeley identified iridium, an element rare on Earth but common in comets and asteroids, in a stratum that had been laid down at the time the dinosaurs died. Their theory that a comet's impact had wrought global death was resisted at first—especially by geologists, who were still preoccupied with volcanoes. But it is now widely accepted that a comet or an asteroid something like ten kilometres wide hit near Yucatán sixty-five million years ago, wreaking enough havoc to doom the dinosaurs and nine-tenths of all other species. The "smoking gun" crater has been identified. It's centered near the port city of Progreso, Mexico, on the coast of Yucatán, and lies partly beneath the ocean. Though buried under nearly a mile of limestone, it turned up on seismic maps compiled by petroleum geologists, and has since been mapped by charting gravitational and magnetic-field lines at the surface. The crater measures more than a hundred miles in diameter. Glass globules thrown off by the impact have been found in contemporaneous strata in Haiti and elsewhere around the globe. The shape of the crater together with evidence of an ejecta-spray pattern suggests that the killer sailed in at an oblique angle of impact that spewed white-hot debris across North America. Research into what Carl Sagan called "the cold and dark" of a nuclear winter helped clarify how explosions can do severe global damage by injecting dust and soot into the upper atmosphere.

The copestone on the arch of potential catastrophe was laid on the night of March 23, 1993, during a routine observing run at Palomar by Eugene Shoemaker; his wife, Carolyn; and the amateur astronomer David Levy. The three had been surveying the sky for ten years, in order, as they put it, "to determine the nature and numbers of objects that crash into the planets and satellites and form craters." Only Shoemaker was paid for this work. His wife was a volunteer, and so was Levy, impecunious and in love with the stars, who drove his battered old sedan from Tucson to Palomar every month at his own expense to help search for comets and asteroids. The skies that night were too cloudy, Shoemaker judged, to risk film on making observations. "We spend almost four dollars each time we put film into the telescope," he said. "We simply can't afford to waste film on a bad night like this one." Levy proposed that they try using some partly fogged sheets of film from the bowels of a box that had inadvertently been opened in light. Two days later, when Carolyn Shoemaker examined the flawed but usable exposed film, she saw a strange smear near Jupiter. It turned out to be a comet that had been trapped in an orbit around Jupiter, probably in 1929 or so, and then had recently been torn into fragments by Jovian tidal forces, resulting in what looked like a string of pearls.

Paul Chodas was alerted by Brian Marsden to calculations by a Japanese amateur astronomer named Syuichi Nakano which suggested that the newly named Shoemaker-Levy was destined to hit Jupiter. When Chodas, at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, ran his impact-prediction program, the results startled him. "I'd always seen zeros before," he recalled. "Suddenly a fifty-per-cent number came up." Chodas went home at five to help his wife care for their four-month-old baby. His colleague Donald Yeomans stayed behind and kept working the numbers, and confirmed that the pearls that were once Shoemaker-Levy were indeed going to hit Jupiter.

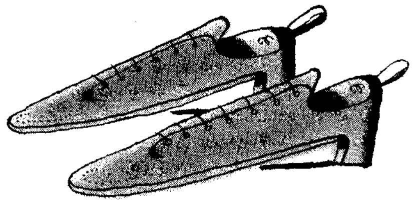
And that is just what happened, sixteen months later. Starting on the night of July 16, 1994, the icebergs trundled in, one after another, like trucks skidding to a pileup, and exploded in Jupiter's upper atmosphere in extravagant, rising fireballs that left the giant planet's salmon- and sand-colored atmospheric bands scarred by a chain of lurid black splotches that endured for weeks. Scientists gaping at this unprecedented sight began taking the threat of comet impacts more seriously. Just before the great comet crash, the astronomer Kevin Zahnle, of the NASA Ames Research Center, in Mountain View, California, had ventured that "the removal of this comet leaves the solar system a slightly safer place for us all." After the crash, however, Zahnle reflected, "But it doesn't feel that way, does it? The solar system no longer seems quite so far away as it did before July, 1994. Here we are, close to the edge, protected from the true immensity of the universe by a thin blue line. A day will surely come when the sheltering sky is torn apart with a power that beggars the imagination. It has happened before. Ask any dinosaur, if you can find one. This is a dangerous place."

III—NO ISLAND EARTH

THE good news about death from above is that the odds against its happening are steep. Earthshaking impacts like the one near Yucatán are estimated to occur only about once in a hundred million years. Encounters with comets and asteroids a kilometre or so in diameter, sufficient to destroy a country the size of India, occur about once in a million years. A thousand years or so typically pass between hundred-metre objects, which could take out a city but would pose no obvious threat to Earth as a whole.

But even if these statistics are accurate—and, after all, they are based on incomplete knowledge of our solar system—to declare that disaster strikes Earth, on average, only once in a thousand years does not mean that we are guaranteed a thousand-year interval between disasters. As Tom Gehrels of the University of Arizona has noted, "the very small chance of it happening tomorrow is just as great as a million years from now." Just last fall, on November 22, 1996, a meteor hit near San Luis, in western Honduras, excavating a crater a hundred and sixty-five feet wide and setting fire to acres of coffee plants. It missed taking out downtown Bangkok or Manila by about ten hours.

We're constantly being bombarded by smaller objects. Every hour, the Earth puts on a ton of weight in the form of micrometeoritic dust: run a damp sponge across a bookshelf, and you pick up a few bits of defunct comets, of grime ground off colliding asteroids, and of powder left behind when the planets formed. Meteors the size of peas can make an eye-opening streak across the night sky before burning up in Earth's atmosphere. Fist-size ones may survive their fiery passage and hit. This happens, somewhere on Earth, about once every two hours.



Occasionally, a meteor seen streaking across the sky is subsequently found on the ground. Locating one normally requires hard work or else luck: pieces of a meteor that exploded about thirty kilometres above Revelstoke, British Columbia, on the night of March 31, 1965, might have soon been lost beneath fresh snowfalls if two fur trappers hadn't come upon the site a couple of weeks later. A few meteorites (a meteorite is a meteor that hits Earth) arrive in a more convenient, if more threatening, fashion. On the evening of Friday, October 9, 1992, thousands of people in the northeastern United States, many of them watching high-school football games, saw a brilliant meteor streak overhead. It broke up in the air. Moments later a twenty-eight-pound chunk of it smashed the right rear fender of a 1980 Chevy Malibu parked outside the home, in Peekskill, New York, of an eighteen-year-old high-school senior named Michelle Knapp. She heard the crash, ventured out, and found the meteorite, "still warm to the touch," resting in a crater beneath the gaping hole it had punched in the car. (Miss Knapp sold the meteorite, classed an "ordinary chondrite," to a collector for a reported fifty-nine thousand dollars; the car, which she had purchased for a hundred dollars, brought ten thousand dollars from a private museum. There's a bull market in meteorites these days.)

Reports of meteorites damaging houses are fairly rare, yet two homes in a single community were hit within a period of eleven years. On the night of November 8, 1982, Robert and Wanda Donahue, of Wethersfield, Connecticut, were watching "M*A*S*H" on television when they heard a crash and rushed into their dining room to find it full of plaster dust. A fireman located the meteorite, grapefruit-size and weighing six pounds, under the dining-room table, where it had evidently come to rest after plunging through the roof and bouncing between floor and ceiling. Oddly, the Donahue home is about a mile from another house, also in

Wethersfield, that had been hit by a meteorite in April, 1971.

History is dotted with unconfirmed anecdotes of individual deaths from above. Chinese military records state that ten people in an Army camp were crushed by stones from the sky in 616 A.D. The one documented case of a person being hit by a meteorite is that of Annie Hodges: while she was napping on a couch in her home, in Sylacauga, Alabama, on November 30, 1954, an eight-and-a-half-pound stony meteorite punched a hole in the ceiling, bounced across the room, and hit her on the hip, raising a nasty bruise.

There have since been no reported injuries by meteorite, but plenty of close calls. In October of 1984, Don Richardson, a Vietnam veteran, was stepping out of his trailer, near Claxton, Georgia, when he flinched at a whistling sound that reminded him of an incoming mortar round; the meteorite responsible smacked into a neighbor's mailbox and knocked it off its post. As Brodie Spaulding, age thirteen, was standing in his front yard, in Noblesville, Indiana, at twilight on August 31, 1992, talking with his nine-year-old neighbor Brian Kinzie, a small meteor blazed in on a low trajectory, whistled past Brodie's right shoulder, and plowed into the grass near the two boys. "When I sit down and think about it," Brodie reflected, "it was kind of scary"—a remark that pretty much sums up the story of how astronomers have come to change their minds about death from above.

THE growing appreciation of the hazards of an impact has already altered conceptions about our relation to the wider solar system. Overturned for good is the assurance that, as generations of textbooks and newspaper articles have habitually put it, "no one in recorded history has ever been killed by a meteorite." Consider tsunamis, the so-called tidal waves that have killed millions of the residents of low-lying coastal regions. Tsunamis can be touched off by undersea earthquakes, or by volcanoes, as when Krakatoa, in Indonesia, blew up, on August 27, 1883, with a force estimated at more than a hundred megatons, generating a wave that sank whole fleets of riverboats at Calcutta, two thousand miles away, and registered on tide gauges in the English Channel. Tsunamis of unknown origin have routinely been attributed to earthquakes and volcanoes. But calculations done by John Lewis and others indicate that large meteorites—most of which slam into the oceans, since most of Earth's surface is water—must also have set off deadly tsunamis. "Over time scales of one hundred thousand years and longer," Lewis writes, "the greatest tsunami waves produced on Earth must be from cosmic impacts." This hypothesis can be tested by looking for extraterrestrial materials mixed into the bathtub rings of debris deposited high above sea level by tsunamis in the past, but none has yet been so examined.

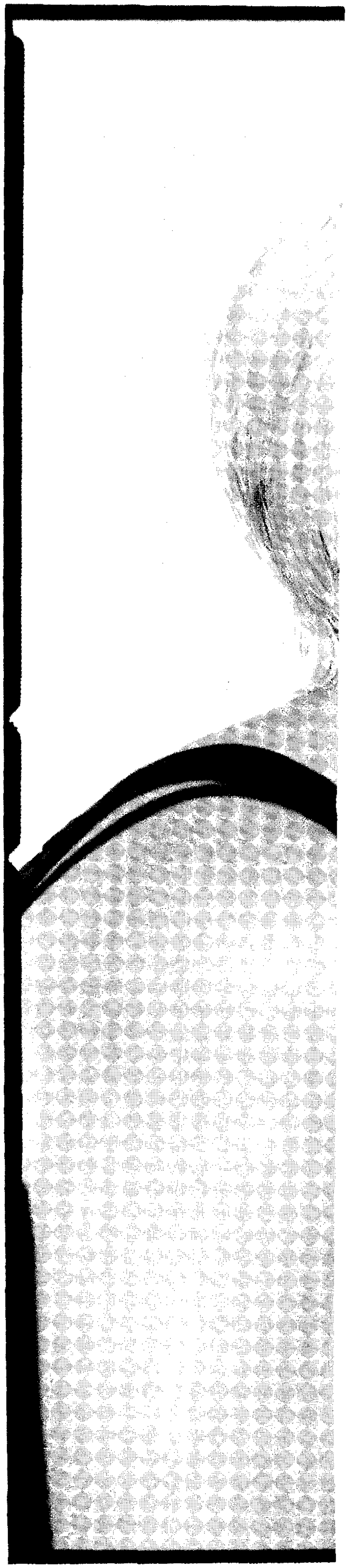
Extrapolating from data adduced by counting craters on the Moon and planets, Lewis has run computer simulations of the fatalities likely to have been occasioned by cosmic impacts on Earth in the course of the twentieth century (which he chose because we have reliable information about the distribution of human populations during that time). The results, though tentative, are sobering. In the first test run that Lewis reports on, more than a hundred people are killed and a thousand injured by an impact tsunami. "But no connection is made between the (unobserved) impact and the casualties," he writes. "Experts report 'no hazard from meteorites.' "

Scientists, having acquired a new sen-

REDGRAVE RULES

At fifty-nine, Vanessa Redgrave is a perfect embodiment of Shakespeare's encomium to Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety." Redgrave returns to the role next month at the Public Theatre, in her new production of "Antony and Cleopatra," following her stagings in London and Houston. She has set the action in the early seventeenth century, drawing parallels between the war-torn Roman Empire and England during the waning of the Renaissance; Octavius Caesar becomes a precursor of the Puritans doing battle against humanist ideals. The play's core, however, remains the love of the two doomed rulers. David Harewood, who played Antony in Houston, repeats the role here: if the image to the right is any indication, the passionate pair should beggar all description.

Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe



sitivity to the impact hazard, have begun to look at historical records with a freshly baleful eye. New significance is being discerned in texts as remote as the ancient Egyptian "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" (circa 2000 B.C.), in which a sympathetic spirit in the form of a giant snake bemoans the loss of his family: "A star fell and they were gone, gone up in flame . . . all burned." The Biblical tale of the Seventh Seal has likewise taken on a tincture of astronomical significance. Chapter 8 of the Book of Revelation reads, "And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters. Many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. . . . The third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth." Indeed, the catastrophic associations of the Biblical phrase "fire and brimstone" may have their origin in the fact that meteors are typically rich in sulfur, for which the archaic word is brimstone.

As with literature, so with historical records. One reads with newfound apprehension that a bolide—an especially bright meteor—exploded over Constantinople on a clear afternoon in 472 A.D., hitting the city with a wave that knocked sailboats flat in the water and rained down black dust; or that on the night of June 25, 1178, according to a report by a monk named Gervase, at Canterbury, England, there was a flash on the crescent Moon that "was repeated a dozen times or more," leaving the Moon with "a blackish appearance." The meteor scholar Jack Hartung identifies this event with a hundred-and-twenty-thousand-megaton explosion that carved out the young lunar crater Giordano Bruno.

Nor are all the tales of hits and near misses so remote in time. On June 30, 1908, an incoming comet or asteroid exploded over the Tunguska region of Siberia, with a blast that flattened trees for fifteen kilometres around and blew enough debris into the atmosphere to cause "white nights," which mystified Europeans, no news reports having reached them from horrified eyewitnesses in the Siberian forest. (In Brancaster, England, a "band of golfers staying here strolled towards the links at 11 o'clock last evening" to take in the oddly brightened sky, a reader named Holcombe Ingelby wrote to the London *Times* the following morning.) The timing was fortunate: a delay of a few hours and the Tunguska bolide could have obliterated St. Petersburg or Oslo.

Sometimes a meteor hits the upper atmosphere and bounces back into space, like a stone skipping off a pond. Tourists in Zion National Park, in Utah, watched in amazement as one such meteor, visible in broad daylight, crossed the sky from south to north on the afternoon of August 10, 1972. The astronomer L. G. Jacchia, who happened to see it himself, estimated the mass of the bolide as approaching a million metric tons. Had it been moving one per cent slower, it would have fallen to Earth, hitting somewhere along a strip of land that includes Provo, Utah, and Salt Lake City. Another skipper streaked over New Mexico last October 3rd, looped once around Earth, reëntered the atmosphere a hundred minutes later, and exploded over Kern County, California.

Small comets and small pieces of defunct big ones hit the Earth all the time, but most detonate in the upper atmosphere. Some of these explosions are robust: almost once a month, a comet or asteroid detonates at high altitude with the force of a kiloton or more of TNT, but these explosions occur too high to do any damage, so quickly and unpredictably that few are seen by human beings. The flashes are often observed, however, by orbiting military surveillance systems, such as the Defense Support Program's DSP-647 satellites. The Defense Department used to throw away data on bolides once it had been determined that they weren't the enemy bombers or the missiles that the system was built to detect, but recently, in response to the pleas of scientists, the government has begun releasing such information. Hence we know, for instance, that on February 1, 1994, there was a hundred-kiloton explosion—ten Hiroshimas—over the Marshall Islands, in the western Pacific. It flashed brighter than the sun, but was evidently seen by only a few fishermen.

IV—WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

One of the problems with attempting to estimate the chance of a collision is that our interplanetary environment changes over time. The threat from comets, for instance, is greater than average during comet-shower periods, when squadrons of comets dislodged from the Oort cloud come hurtling into our neighborhood; some astronomers think we're in a comet shower today. The case for taking the danger seriously was made in a NASA study of near-Earth objects: "Although, statistically speaking, the risk of major impacts in the near future is low, the possible consequences are so vast that every reasonable effort should be encouraged in order to minimize them."

So what do we do? The first step, astronomers agree, is to take a census of everything out there that is big enough and close enough to threaten us. Oddly, this has not yet been done. One might think of astronomers as scanning the skies, like lookouts on shipboard, but in reality most professional astronomers scrutinize tiny pieces of sky and seldom do any scanning at all. Big telescopes have fields of view too narrow to embrace a major lunar crater, much less sweep the heavens for comets and asteroids. Wide-field telescopes can do the job, but they are customarily assigned to other duties. Sky-scanning is left mainly to amateurs, and to a few offbeat professionals, like Gene Shoemaker. David Morrison, who has the delightful title "director of space" at the NASA Ames Research Center, likes to say that the number of people searching for threatening astronomical objects is "smaller than the staff of one McDonald's restaurant." Collectively, this little band discovers two or three Earth-approaching asteroids every month—a useful contribution but not enough to make any considerable dent in our ignorance. Extrapolating from such findings, and from the cratering rates of the Moon and other satellites, scientists calculate that about two thousand asteroids larger than a kilometre in diameter—big enough to generate devastating tsunamis and threaten "nuclear winter"—cross Earth's orbit. To date, only about a tenth of them have been located.

A BOY AND HIS SPIN PATROL
Firstborns are always temperamental. It's a sign of intelligence.
He marches to his own drummer, like all geniuses.
R. Chast

One of the few professional scanners of the skies is Tom Gehrels, a lean, urbane man whose insouciance may have something to do with the waning days of the Second World War, when, at the age of twenty, he parachuted into his native Holland. "We were young, we were expected to be thinking about the future, only there was no future," he recalled recently during a talk we had at a planetary-sciences conference in Tucson. He survived the war and enrolled in the astronomy program at Leiden University. Jan Oort was there, and he inspired in Gehrels a lifelong devotion to comets and asteroids, which were dismissed by most leading astronomers in those days as "vermin of the skies"—bothersome lowlifes that got in the way of serious work on galaxies and nebulae. "Why do I study them?" Gehrels asked rhetorically. "Why did you fall in love with your wife? But, of course, such an answer won't do in this business. You have to make up phony reasons to explain why you're doing what you're doing."

What Gehrels has been doing since 1981 is running the Spacewatch program. Until recently, Spacewatch, supported partly by private donations, relied upon an old thirty-six-inch telescope at Kitt Peak, in Arizona, to hunt down asteroids with a diameter a kilometre or more. "One or two or so might have our name on them," he has said. "That is an intolerable uncertainty that we, as scientists, are responsible for and have to take care of."

Gehrels has graduated to a larger telescope, but asteroids are hard to see, and detecting those as small as a hundred metres in diameter—the ones capable of levelling a city—may take time, even with a more sophisticated search effort. Nor would such a search warn us of the rarer but potentially more lethal long-period comets: an early-warning system capable of detecting those in time might require that sensors be deployed beyond the orbit of Jupiter. Meanwhile, we remain in the dark, subject to unwelcome surprises like the advent of Asteroid 1994 XM1, a tumbling, house-size boulder that was discovered only one day before it flew past Earth at a distance of only sixty-five thousand miles. "Such 'near hits' probably happen once or twice a week," Lewis says, "but pass unnoticed because there is no large-scale survey of the skies going on to seek them out."

If an asteroid or short-period comet should be discovered to pose a threat to Earth, what could be done to stop it? The answer depends upon several things, including the object's mass: not surprisingly, the bigger, more dangerous ones are harder to move around than the little ones. But the most important consideration is how much warning time we'd have. If impact was years away, many options would be available. We could, for instance, land a probe on a threatening asteroid and use the probe's rocket motor to alter the asteroid's orbit into a safer path. If, however, the warning time was short—and for an incoming comet it could be only a matter of months—the sole recourse might be a high-powered interceptor rocket armed with a bomb powerful enough to blow it off course.

From such considerations it came to pass one dark night in 1994 that Edward Teller, known as "the father of the hydrogen bomb," found himself in the front seat of a bus speeding down a remote highway east of the Urals, his face illuminated by the flashing blue lights of a police escort, on his way to the Russian Federal Nuclear Center at Snezhinsk, better known as Chelyabinsk-70.

The scientists and engineers at Chelyabinsk-70 are experts in the design and manufacture of nuclear weapons, missiles, and tracking systems. Since the end of the Cold War, they have had little to do, and many have not been paid for months. Morale there has long been low, and it sank even lower last October, when the director of Chelyabinsk-70, Vladimir Nechai, locked himself in his office and shot himself. Teller is director emeritus of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, an American center of nuclear-weapons research. The situation there is of course not nearly so dire as at Chelyabinsk-70, but the nuclear-weapons budget at Teller's lab has been cut almost in half during the past five years.

On the bus, an American colleague recalls, Teller chatted animatedly with fellow-scientists about the end of the world. At Chelyabinsk-70, he described how nukes could be used to prevent it. He had in mind big nukes, more powerful than anything in the world's arsenals, big enough to atomize a major comet. As he said soon after the Chelyabinsk meeting, "we are very sick, I have a cure, and my only concern is to achieve overkill."

Other scientists had been quick to object to Teller's injecting nuclear weapons into the previously pacific field of asteroid research, and Teller soon retreated to the position that conventional explosives could do the job. But by that time he was deeply embroiled in a debate with several researchers, Carl Sagan among them, who feared that even a non-nuclear "cure" would be worse than the disease. Clark Chapman, an astronomer of the Southwest Research Institute in Boulder, Colorado, denounced Teller's proposals as "radically more expensive and dangerous than the modest threat they would address." Others argued that even a non-nuclear deflection system, if it fell into the hands of a maniac, could be used to redirect a previously benign comet or asteroid into a collision course with Earth. Deflection "is a double-edged sword," Sagan and a colleague wrote in the journal *Nature.* "If we can perturb an asteroid out of impact trajectory, it follows that we can also transform one on a benign trajectory into an Earth-impactor."

Teller is arguably the least popular eminent physicist in America. Born in Budapest in 1908, he obtained his Ph.D. in Leipzig and fled Germany when Hitler came to power. He worked on the Manhattan Project and, after the war, pressed for development of the hydrogen bomb. During the McCarthy era, Teller testified concerning J. Robert Oppenheimer, who had reservations about the H-bomb. Teller portrayed Oppenheimer to the F.B.I. as left-leaning and expressed doubts about him in the Atomic Energy Commission hearings that resulted in the revocation of Oppenheimer's security clearance. Many physicists have forgiven Teller neither for what they see as his betrayal of Oppenheimer nor for his devotion to secret weapons research. He remains defiant, warning that by cutting the funding of weapons "we are rushing into a third world war by means of disarmament," and he delights in repeating deliberately unsettling utterances like, "A little radiation can be good for you." Teller also literally carries a big stick, supporting himself with a head-high cudgel thicker than his arm.

The stick was resting against the doorjamb of his office when I visited him recently, at the Hoover Institution, at Stanford University. He was seated behind a small blond wood desk, wearing a pin-striped suit and black cowboy boots, and gazing out from under his famously ample and bushy gray eyebrows. As we talked, his right eye remained nearly closed, while his left eye fixed me with an animated, cetacean gaze.

I asked Teller about critics who charge that his enthusiasm for intercepting near-Earth objects is technologically driven—that he's looking for a mission that would both "save the world" and rescue his laboratory from further budget cuts through the application of technology developed for the Strategic Defense Initiative. "Surely it has occurred to you that S.D.I. technology might be applied to this problem," I ventured.

"Anything can be applied to anything else," Teller replied. "It is only in this sense that I agree with you. I say that we are now both talking about utter nonsense."

What about the concern, voiced by some scientists, that if a threatening comet or asteroid were to be discovered, the government might "go black," and keep its existence secret in order to work feverishly, without waiting for formal congressional approval, on using classified Star Wars weapons to deflect it?

Teller's open eye opened wider. "That would be a crime," he growled.

"But might it happen?"

"To hold this fact a secret, to concentrate a decision power in a relatively few hands, is as undemocratic a statement as you can possibly make." He leaned forward. "Are you a Communist?" he demanded.

"No," I replied.

"Are you a Fascist?"

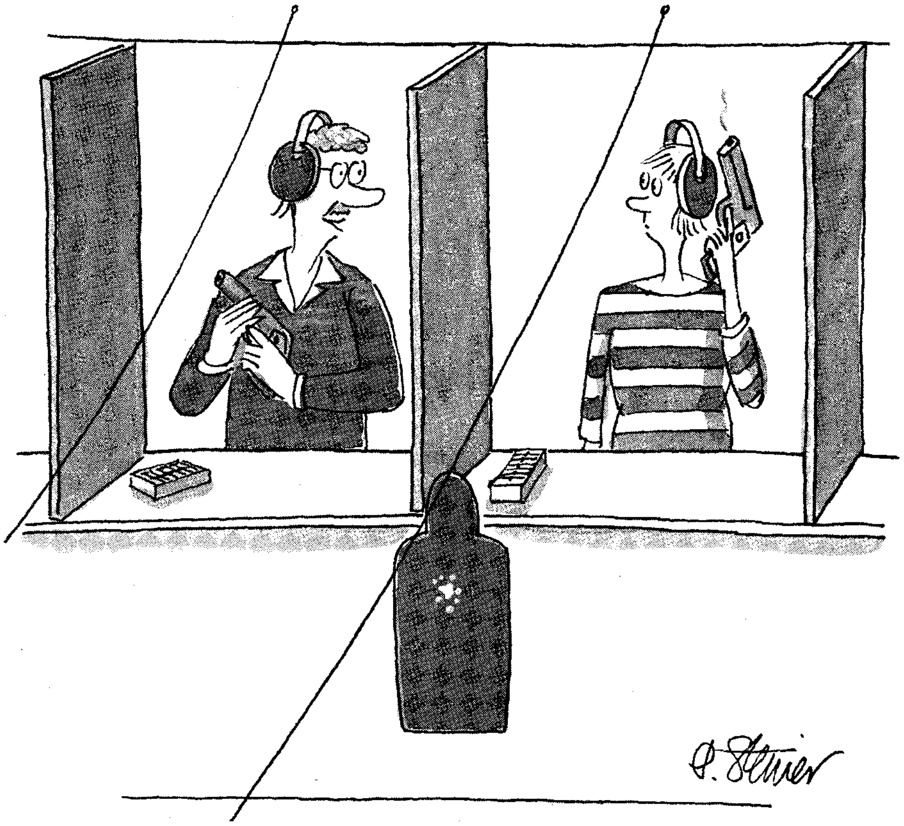
"No."

"Well, if you aren't, it should be obvious to you that such a thing would be a crime. My opinion is that secrecy is mistaken, and the application of secrecy to the discovery of such a thing is the most horrible example of secrecy, which is in itself practically never good, in a particularly terrible manner."

"Yet you've worked on many classified projects yourself, in the course of your career."

"I did not try to classify them. I come from Europe and, coming from Europe, I was probably more aware than most of my associates of the danger of Hitler and also of the danger of Stalin. You Americans think that this is far away and uninteresting. I, a European, know that it is, after all, not as far away."

I asked Teller about the Sagan objection that an asteroid-deflection system might be more dangerous than the asteroids are. "To my mind, this makes no sense at all," Teller replied. "If I want to do damage in



"I know this sounds like a line, but nice shooting."

LOVE IN PLACE

I really don't remember falling in love all that much
I remember wanting to bake corn bread and boil a ham and I
certainly remember making lemon pie and when I used to smoke I
stopped in the middle of my day to contemplate

I know I must have fallen in love once because I quit biting
my cuticles and my hair is gray and that must indicate
something and I all of a sudden had a deeper appreciation
for Billie Holiday and Billy Strayhorn so if it wasn't love I don't
know what it was

I see the old photographs and I am smiling and I'm sure quite
happy but what I mostly see is me
through your eyes
and I am still young and slim and very much committed to the
love we still have

—Nikki Giovanni

Moscow, there are a million ways how to do it more easily than to deflect an asteroid. If somebody wants to try such a thing, he has to do it practically publicly. It would be difficult, practically impossible, to keep secret, and such a thing can be worried about only by people whose main purpose in life is to worry."

SAGAN did not look worried when I talked with him about asteroids, over breakfast in a restaurant in Washington, D.C., but he did look frail. He had undergone bone-marrow therapy for myelodysplasia, a rare blood disease, and the procedure had cost him his hair and left his skin the color of rice paper. But his latest test reports were all nominal, and he had no reason to anticipate the sudden reversals that would lead to his death, from pneumonia, only five weeks later.

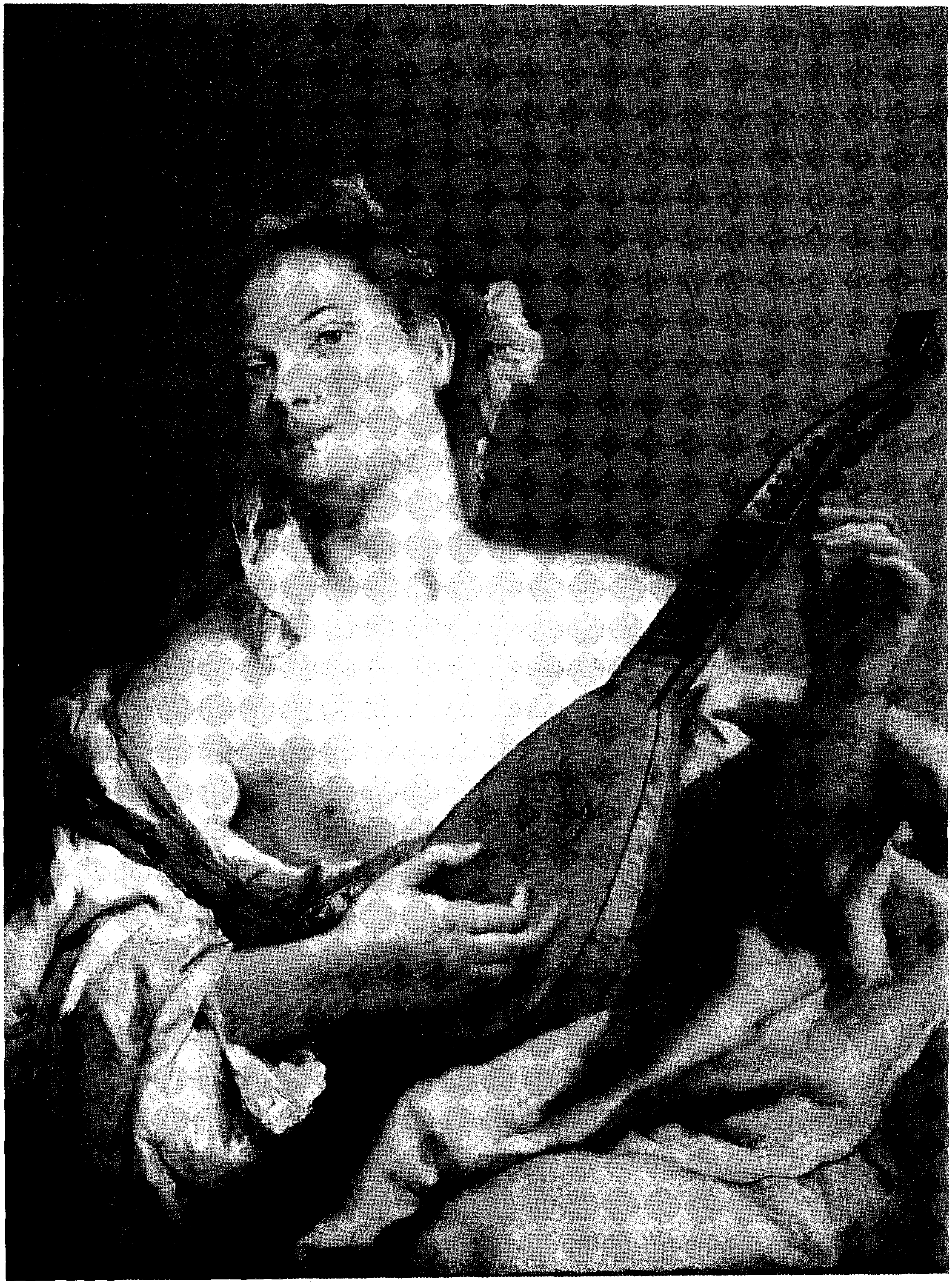
"The Cold War is over, and at best there is funding for maintaining a small arsenal of a few thousand nuclear weapons instead of a few tens of thousands of weapons," Sagan said. "That just isn't enough to maintain the full weapons establishments at the Livermore, Los Alamos, and Sandia laboratories, much less at Chelyabinsk-70 and the corresponding Chinese center. So for those guys the threat of impact is a godsend. We're told that we need to develop nuclear weapons to deflect those comets and asteroids that might hit the Earth—a whole new enterprise, called planetary protection. Who could object to that? Protecting the entire planet, independent of race, religion, creed, or national origin.

"For a while, Edward Teller was saying that we needed to develop weapons of a much higher yield than had been developed hereto, because that's what you need to pulverize a large near-Earth object. But it was soon realized that deflecting is more efficient than pulverizing. You give it a little nudge at perihelion, when the object is at its closest distance to the sun. And that little nudge at perihelion makes a big miss of the Earth later on in the orbit."

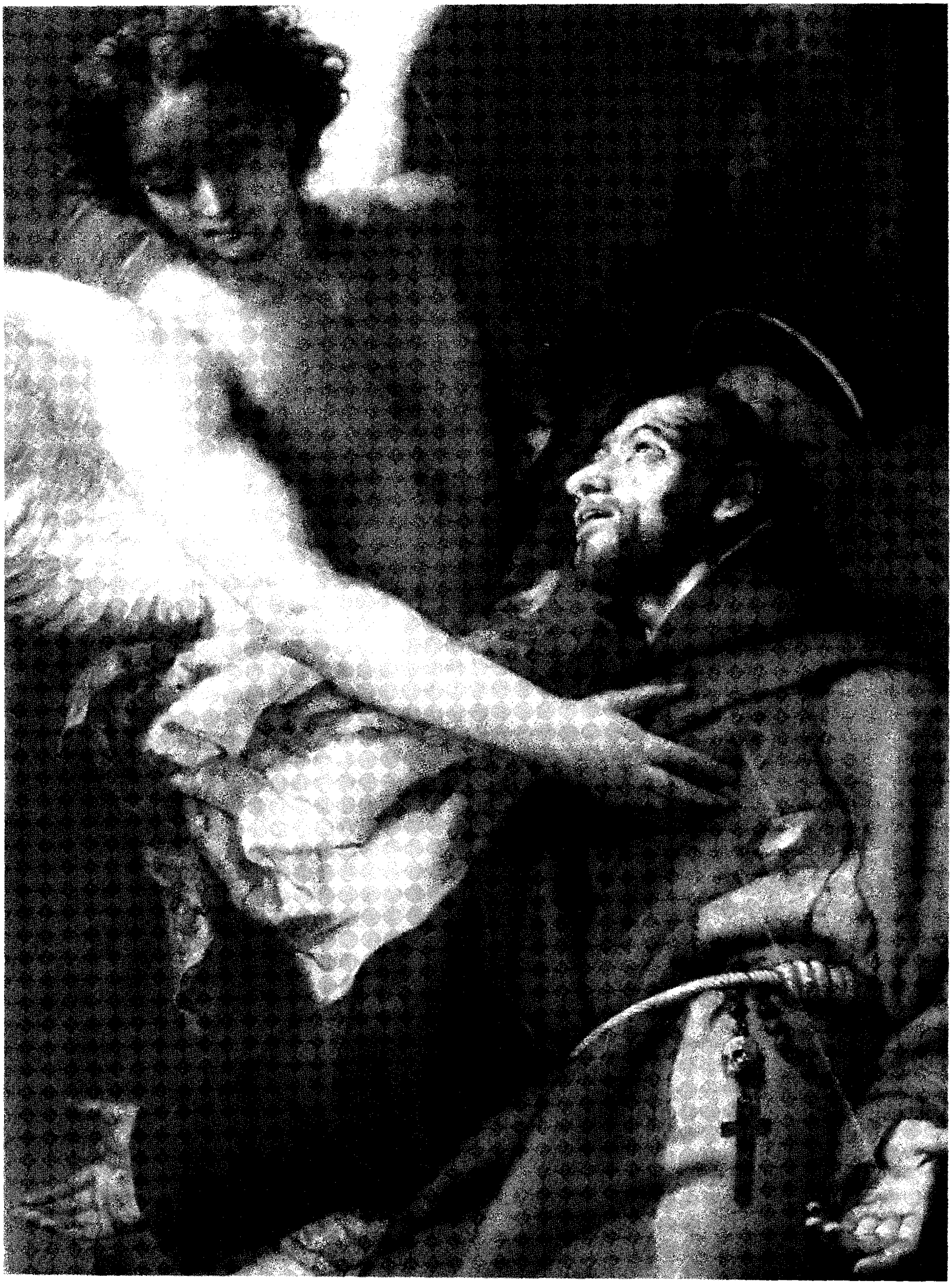
Sagan went on, "Edward is a very clever fellow. For example, he who has thrived in secrecy makes a big to-do about being opposed to classification. He loves to have it both ways. And likewise here. He doesn't insist on nuclear weapons. Conventional weapons that deflect a little will suffice for him, but meanwhile, he maintains, it would be unwise not to have nuclear weapons available for this task. Whatever kinds of weapons you're going to use to deflect or disintegrate, you have to test them long in advance. You wouldn't want an untested weapon. And so, in his view, we have to go into an operation mode right away with missiles and nuclear weapons.

"That breaks three international treaties that we are signatories of: the Outer Space Treaty, the limited test-ban treaty, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. But the thing that really worries me is that if you had this capability, then a madman, or somebody just making a stupid error, could deflect an asteroid so that it hit the Earth. The chances are, of course, low. There would be safeguards. People would be looking over each other's shoulders, naturally. But, remember, this is a case where people are worried about an accident whose probability is one part in a hundred thousand, the accidental hitting of the Earth. Can they be sure that there's no chance of one in a hundred thousand of a madman taking over a modern industrial state? Or some religious fundamentalist wishing to bring about the Apocalypse? To say that only a madman would do such a thing may be perfectly right, but madmen do exist. Hitler, in 1945, gave instructions to destroy Germany, to destroy even the means for the people to live, because they weren't fighting hard enough against the Allies, and also because of a social Darwinist argument that the really strong Germans had all been killed, and the ones left would be the weaklings anyway. It's not out of the question that somebody in control of a modern industrial state, in a situation of great emotional stress, might be perfectly happy to destroy a country, or a region, or the planet."

COMETS really can "wipe out the old and establish the new," as Li Ch'un Feng had it long ago. The impact that killed the dinosaurs cleared ecological room for the explosive radiation of new life-forms, our distant ancestors among them. The human species is much too young to have any cultural memory of that ancient disaster, but perhaps a smaller yet still noxious comet hit more recently, in preliterate times, when there were people around to suffer the consequences and tell stories about it. Current studies indicate that there must have been at least one ten-gigaton impact within the past seventy thousand years—a horrific blast, which would have blacked out the sun, flooded much of the world, drenched the land with fire and the smell of brimstone, and otherwise brought down a whole Biblical apocalypse. And it seems reasonable to assume that the poets and storytellers of the day would have sought to preserve the memory of so dreadful an event, without concerning themselves overmuch with whether professors of the future were destined to poke fun at their tales. If so, the realization that comets and asteroids can put us in harm's way is not just bright new knowledge but also a species of remembrance. ♦



TIEPOLO & CO. *The Metropolitan Museum marks the three-hundred-and-first birthday of Giambattista Tiepolo ("Woman with a Mandolin" an*



OPPOSITE, COURTESY OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS; THIS PAGE, MUSEO DEL PRADO, MADRID

tail from "St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata" above). Related shows at the Met celebrate his sons, his city (Venice), and—at the Morgan Library—his circle.

FICTION

PEOPLE LIKE THAT ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE HERE

BY LORRIE MOORE

A BEGINNING, an end: there seems to be neither. The whole thing is like a cloud that just lands, and everywhere inside it is full of rain. A start: the Mother finds a blood clot in the Baby's diaper. What is the story? Who put this here? It is big and bright, with a broken, khaki-colored vein in it. Over the weekend, the Baby had looked listless and spacey, clayey and grim. But today he looks fine—so what is this thing, startling against the white diaper, like a tiny mouse heart packed in snow? Perhaps it belongs to someone else. Perhaps it is something menstrual, something belonging to the Mother or to the Babysitter, something the Baby has found in a wastebasket and for his own demented baby reasons stowed away here. (Babies—they're crazy! What can you do?) In her mind, the Mother takes this away from his body and attaches it to someone else's. There. Doesn't that make more sense?

Still, she phones the children's-hospital clinic. Blood in the diaper, she says, and, sounding alarmed and perplexed, the woman on the other end says, "Come in now."

Such pleasingly instant service! Just say "blood." Just say "diaper." Look what you get!

In the examination room, the pediatrician, the nurse, and the head resident all seem less alarmed and perplexed than simply perplexed. At first, stupidly, the Mother is calmed by this. But soon, besides peering and saying "Hmm," the doctor, the nurse, and the head resident are all drawing their mouths in, bluish and tight—morning glories sensing noon. They fold their arms across their white-coated chests, unfold them again, and jot things down. They order an ultrasound. Bladder and kidneys. Here's the card. Go downstairs, turn left.

In Radiology, the Baby stands anxiously on the table, naked against the Mother, as she holds him still against her legs and waist, the Radiologist's cold scanning disk moving about the Baby's back. The Baby whimpers, looks up at the Mother. *Let's get out of here*, his eyes beg. *Pick me up!* The Radiologist stops, freezes one of the many swirls of oceanic gray, and clicks repeatedly, a single moment within the long, cavernous weather map that is the Baby's insides.

"Are you taking notes?" "No." "You're not?" "No, I can't. Not this! I write fiction. This isn't fiction." Photograph of the author by Mark Lyon.

"Are you finding something?" asks the Mother. Last year, her Uncle Larry had a kidney removed for something that turned out to be benign. These imaging machines! They are like dogs, or metal detectors: they find everything but don't know what they've found. That's where the surgeons come in. They're like the owners of the dogs. *Give me that*, they say to the dog. *What the heck is that?*

"The surgeon will speak to you," says the Radiologist.

"Are you finding something?"

"The surgeon will speak to you," the Radiologist says again. "There seems to be something there, but the surgeon will talk to you about it."

"My uncle once had something on his kidney," says the Mother. "So they removed the kidney and it turned out the something was benign."

The Radiologist smiles a broad, ominous smile. "That's always the way it is," he says. "You don't know exactly what it is until it's in the bucket."

"In the bucket," the Mother repeats.

"That's doctor talk," the Radiologist says.

"It's very appealing," says the Mother. "It's a very appealing way to talk." Swirls of bile and blood, mustard and maroon in a pail, the colors of an African flag or some exuberant salad bar: *in the bucket*—she imagines it all.

"The surgeon will see you soon," he says again. He tousles the Baby's ringlety hair. "Cute kid," he says.

"LET'S see now," says the Surgeon, in one of his examining rooms. He has stepped in, then stepped out, then come back in again. He has crisp, frowning features, sharp bones, and a tennis-in-Bermuda tan. He crosses his blue-cottoned legs. He is wearing clogs.

The Mother knows her own face is a big white dumpling of worry. She is still wearing her long, dark parka, holding the Baby, who has pulled the hood up over her head because he always thinks it's funny to do that. Though on certain windy mornings she would like to think she could look vaguely romantic like this, like some French Lieutenant's Woman of the Prairie, in all her saner moments she knows she doesn't. She knows she looks ridiculous—like one of those animals made out of twisted party balloons. She lowers the hood and slips one arm out of the sleeve. The Baby wants to get up and play with the light switch. He fidgets, fusses, and points.

"He's big on lights these days," explains the Mother.

"That's O.K.," says the Surgeon, nodding toward the light switch. "Let him play with it." The Mother goes and stands by it, and the Baby begins turning the lights off and on, off and on.

"What we have here is a Wilms' tumor," says the Surgeon, suddenly plunged into darkness. He says "tumor" as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

"Wilms'?" repeats the Mother. The room is quickly on fire again with light, then wiped dark again. Among the three of them here there is a long silence, as if it were suddenly the middle of the night. "Is that apostrophe 's' or 's' apostrophe?" the Mother says finally. She is a writer and a teacher. Spelling can be important—perhaps even at a time like this, though she has never before been at a time like this, so there are barbarisms she could easily commit without knowing.

The lights come on; the world is doused and exposed.

" 'S' apostrophe," says the Surgeon. "I think." The lights go back out, but the Surgeon continues speaking in the dark. "A malignant tumor of the left kidney."

Wait a minute. Hold on here. The Baby is only a baby, fed on organic applesauce and soy milk—a little prince!—and he was standing so close to her during the ultrasound. How could he have this terrible thing? It must have been *her* kidney. A fifties kidney. A DDT kidney. The Mother clears her throat. "Is it possible it was my kidney on the scan? I mean, I've never heard of a baby with a tumor, and, frankly, I was standing very close." She would make the blood hers, the tumor hers; it would all be some treacherous, farcical mistake.

"No, that's not possible," says the Surgeon. The light goes back on.

"It's not?" says the Mother. Wait until it's *in the bucket*, she thinks. Don't be so sure. *Do we have to wait until it's in the bucket to find out a mistake has been made*?

"We will start with a radical nephrectomy," says the Surgeon, instantly thrown into darkness again. His voice comes from nowhere and everywhere at once. "And then we'll begin with chemotherapy after that. These tumors usually respond very well to chemo."

"I've never heard of a baby having chemo," the Mother says. Baby and Chemo, she thinks: they should never even appear in the same sentence together, let alone the same life. In her other life, her life before this day, she was a believer in alternative medicine. Chemotherapy? Unthinkable. Now, suddenly, alternative medicine seems the wacko maiden aunt to the Nice Big Daddy of Conventional Treatment. How quickly the old girl faints and gives way, leaves one just standing there. Chemo? Of course: chemo! Why, by all means: chemo. Absolutely! Chemo!

The Baby flicks the switch back on, and the walls reappear, big wedges of light checkered with small framed watercolors of the local lake. The Mother has begun to cry: all of life has led her here, to this moment. After this there is no more life. There is something else, something stumbling and unlivable, something mechanical, something for robots, but not life. Life has been taken and broken, quickly, like a stick. The room goes dark again, so that the Mother can cry more freely. How can a baby's body be stolen so fast? How much can one heaven-sent and unsuspecting child endure? Why has he not been spared this inconceivable fate?

Perhaps, she thinks, she is being punished: too many babysitters too early on. ("Come to Mommy! Come to Mommy-Babysitter!" she used to say. But it was a joke!) Her life, perhaps, bore too openly the marks and wigs of deepest drag. Her unmotherly thoughts had all been noted: the panicky hope that his nap would last just a little longer than it did; her occasional desire to kiss him passionately on the mouth (to make out with her baby!); her ongoing complaints about the very vocabulary of motherhood, how it degraded the speaker. ("Is this a poopie onesie? Yes, it's a very poopie onesie!") She had, moreover, on three occasions used the formula bottles as flower vases. She twice let the Baby's ears get fudgy with wax. A few afternoons last month, at snack time, she placed a bowl of Cheerios on the floor for him to eat, like a dog. She let him play with the Dustbuster. Just once, before he was born, she said, "Healthy? I just want the kid to be rich." A joke, for God's sake. After he was born, she announced that her life had become a daily sequence of mind-wrecking chores, the same ones over and over again, like a novel by Mrs. Camus. Another joke! These jokes will kill you. She had told too often, and with too much enjoyment, the story of how the Baby had said "Hi" to his high chair, waved at the lake waves, shouted "Goody-goody-goody" in what seemed to be a Russian accent, pointed at his eyes and said "Ice." And all that nonsensical baby talk: wasn't it a stitch? *Canonical babbling*, the language experts called it. He recounted whole stories in it, totally made up, she could tell; he embroidered, he fished, he exaggerated. What a card! To friends she spoke of his eating habits (carrots yes, tuna no). She mentioned, too much, his sidesplitting giggle. Did she have to be so boring? Did she have no consideration for others, for the intellectual demands and courtesies of human society? Would she not even attempt to be more interesting? It was a crime against the human mind not even to try.

Now her baby, for all these reasons—lack of motherly gratitude, motherly judgment, motherly proportion—will be taken away.

The room is fluorescently ablaze again. The Mother digs around in her parka pocket and comes up with a Kleenex. It is old and thin, like a mashed flower saved from a dance; she dabs it at her eyes and nose.

"The baby won't suffer as much as you," says the Surgeon.

And who can contradict? Not the Baby, who in his Slavic Betty Boop voice can say only *mama*, *dada*, *cheese*, *ice*, *bye-bye*, *outside*, *boogie-boogie*, *goody-goody*, *eddy-eddy*, and *car*. (Who is Eddy? They have no idea.) This will not suffice to express his mortal suffering. Who can say what babies do with their agony and shock? Not they themselves. (Baby talk: isn't it a stitch?) They put it all no place anyone can really see. They are like a different race, a different species: they seem not to experience pain the way we do. Yeah, that's it: their nervous systems are not as fully formed, and *they just don't experience pain the way we do.* A tune to keep one humming through the war. "You'll get through it," the Surgeon says.

"How?" asks the Mother. "How does one get through it?"

"You just put your head down and go," says the Surgeon. He picks up his file folder. He is a skilled manual laborer. The tricky emotional stuff is not to his liking. The babies. The babies! What can be said to console the parents about the babies? “I’ll go phone the oncologist on duty to let him know,” he says, and leaves the room.

“Come here, sweetie,” the Mother says to the Baby, who has toddled off toward a gum wrapper on the floor. “We’ve got to put your jacket on.” She picks him up and he reaches for the light switch again. Light, dark. Peekaboo: Where’s baby? Where did baby go?

At home, she leaves a message—Urgent! Call me!—for the Husband on his voice mail. Then she takes the Baby upstairs for his nap, rocks him in the rocker. The Baby waves goodbye to his little bears, then looks toward the window and says, “Bye-bye, outside.” He has, lately, the habit of waving goodbye to everything, and now it seems as if he sensed some imminent departure, and it breaks her heart to hear him. *Bye-bye!* She sings low and monotonously, like a small appliance, which is how he likes it. He is drowsy, dozy, drifting off. He has grown so much in the last year he hardly fits in her lap anymore; his limbs dangle off like a Pietà. His head rolls slightly inside the crook of her arm. She can feel him falling backward into sleep, his mouth round and open like the sweetest of poppies. All the lullabies in the world, all the melodies threaded through with maternal melancholy now become for her—abandoned as mothers can be by working men and napping babies—the songs of hard, hard grief. Sitting there, bowed and bobbing, the Mother feels the entirety of her love as worry and heartbreak. A quick and irrevocable alchemy: there is no longer one unworried scrap left for happiness. “If you go,” she keens low into his soapy neck, into the ranunculus coil of his ear, “we are going with you. We are nothing without you. Without you, we are a heap of rocks. Without you, we are two stumps, with nothing any longer in our hearts. Wherever this takes you, we are following; we will be there. Don’t be scared. We are going, too, wherever you go. That is that. That is that.”

“TAKE notes,” says the Husband, after coming straight home from work, midafternoon, hearing the news, and saying all the words out loud—*surgery*, *metastasis*, *dialysis*, *transplant*—then collapsing in a chair in tears. “Take notes. We are going to need the money.”

“Good God,” cries the Mother. Everything inside her suddenly begins to cower and shrink, a thinning of bones. Perhaps this is a soldier’s readiness, but it has the whiff of death and defeat. It feels like a heart attack, a failure of will and courage, a power failure: a failure of everything. Her face, when she glimpses it in a mirror, is cold and bloated with shock, her eyes scarlet and shrunk. She has already started to wear sunglasses indoors, like a celebrity widow. From where will her own strength come? From some philosophy? From some frigid little philosophy? She is neither stalwart nor realistic and has trouble with basic concepts, such as the one that says events move in one direction only and do not jump up, turn around, and take themselves back.

The Husband begins too many of his sentences with “What if.” He is trying to piece everything together, like a train wreck. He is trying to get the train to town.

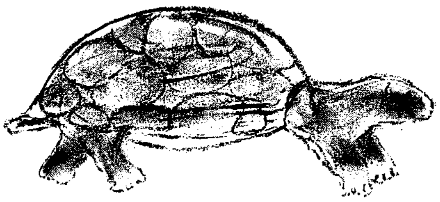
“We’ll just take all the steps, move through all the stages. We’ll go where we have to go, we’ll hunt, we’ll find, we’ll pay what we have to pay. What if we can’t pay?”

“Sounds like shopping.”

“I cannot believe this is happening to our little boy,” he says, and starts to sob again.

What is to be said? You turn just slightly and there it is: the death of your child. It is part symbol, part devil, and in your blind spot all along, until it is upon you. Then it is a fierce little country abducting you; it holds you squarely inside itself like a cellar room, the best boundaries of you are the boundaries of it. Are there windows? Sometimes aren’t there windows?

THE Mother is not a shopper. She hates to shop, is generally bad at it, though she does like a good sale. She cannot stroll meaningfully through anger, denial, grief, and acceptance. She goes straight to bargaining and stays there. How much? She calls out to the ceiling, to some makeshift construction of holiness she has desperately though not uncreatively assembled in her mind and prayed to; a doubter, never before given to prayer, she must now reap what she has not sown; she must reassemble an entire altar of worship and begging. She tries for noble abstractions, nothing too anthropomorphic, just some Higher Morality, though if this particular Highness looks something like the Manager at Marshall Field’s, sucking a Frango mint, so be it. Amen. Just tell me what you want, requests the Mother. And how do you want it? More charitable acts? A billion, starting now. Charitable thoughts? Harder, but of course! Of course! I’ll do the cooking, honey, I’ll pay the rent. Just tell me. *Excuse me?* Well, if not to you, to whom do I speak? Hello? To whom do I have to speak around here? A higher-up? A superior? Wait? I can wait. I’ve got the whole damn day.



The Husband now lies next to her on their bed, sighing. “Poor little guy could survive all this only to be killed in a car crash at the age of sixteen,” he says.

The Mother, bargaining, considers this. “We’ll take the car crash,” she says.

“What?”

“Let’s Make a Deal! Sixteen is a full life! We’ll take the car crash. We’ll take the car crash in front of which Carol Merrill is now standing.”

Now the Manager of Marshall Field’s reappears. “To take the surprises out is to take the life out of life,” he says.

The phone rings. The Husband leaves the room.

“But I don’t want these surprises,” says the Mother. “Here! You take these surprises!”

“To know the narrative in advance is to turn yourself into a machine,” the Manager continues. “What makes humans human is precisely that they do not know the future. That is why they do the fateful and amusing things they do: who can say how anything will turn out? Therein lies the only hope for redemption, discovery, and—let’s be frank—fun, fun, fun! There might be things people will get away with. And not just motel towels. There might be great illicit loves, enduring joy—or faith-shaking accidents with farm machinery. But you have to not know in order to see what stories your life’s efforts bring you. The mystery is all.”

The Mother, though shy, has grown confrontational. “Is this the kind of bogus, random crap they teach at merchandising school? We would like fewer surprises, fewer efforts and mysteries, thank you. K through 8; can we just get K through 8?” It now seems like the luckiest, most beau-

"Gee, he looks just like his suspect sketch."

tiful, most musical phrase she's ever heard: K through 8—the very lilt. The very thought.

The Manager continues, trying things out. "I mean, the whole conception of 'the story,' of cause and effect, the whole idea that people have a clue as to how the world works, is just a piece of laughable metaphysical colonialism perpetrated upon the wild country of time."

Did they own a gun? The Mother begins looking through drawers.

The Husband comes back in the room and observes her. "Ha! The Great Havoc That Is the Puzzle of All Life!" he says of the Marshall Field's management policy. He has just gotten off a conference call with the insurance company and the hospital. The surgery will be Friday. "It's all just some dirty capitalist's idea of a philosophy."

"Maybe it's just a fact of narrative, and you really can't politicize it," says the Mother. It is now only the two of them.

"Whose side are you on?"

"I'm on the Baby's side."

"Are you taking notes for this?"

"No."

"You're not?"

"No. I can't. Not this! I write fiction. This isn't fiction."

"Then write nonfiction. Do a piece of journalism. Get two dollars a word."

"Then it has to be true and full of information. I'm not trained. I'm not that skilled. Plus, I have a convenient personal principle about artists' not abandoning art. One should never turn one's back on a vivid imagination. Even the whole memoir thing annoys me."

"Well, make things up but pretend they're real."

"I'm not that insured."

"You're making me nervous."

"Sweetie, darling, I'm not that good. I can't *do this*. I can do—what can I do? I can do quasi-amusing phone dialogue. I can do succinct descriptions of weather. I can do screwball outings with the family pet. Sometimes I can do those. Honey, I only do what I can. I do *the careful ironies of daydream*. I do *the marshy ideas upon which intimate life is built*. But this? Our baby with cancer? I'm sorry. My stop was two stations back. This is irony at its most gaudy and careless. This is a Hieronymus Bosch of facts and figures and blood and graphs. This is a nightmare of narrative slop. This cannot be designed. This cannot even be noted in preparation for a design—"

"We're going to need the money."

"To say nothing of the moral boundaries of pecuniary recompense in a situation such as this—"

"What if the other kidney goes? What if he needs a transplant? Where are the moral boundaries there? What are we going to do, have bake sales?"

"We can sell the house. I hate this house. It makes me crazy."

"And we'll live—where, again?"

"The Ronald McDonald place. I hear it's nice. It's the least McDonald's can do."

"You have a keen sense of justice."

"I try. What can I say?"

The Husband buries his face in his hands: "Our poor baby. How did this happen to him?" He looks over and stares at the bookcase that serves as their nightstand. "And is any one of these baby books a help?" He picks up the Leach, the Spock, the "What to Expect." "Where in the pages or index of any of these does it say 'chemotherapy' or 'Hickman catheter' or 'renal sarcoma'? Where does it say 'carcinogenesis' or 'metastasis'? You know what these books are obsessed with? *Holding a fucking spoon*." He begins hurling the books off the nightstand and against the far wall.

"Hey," says the Mother, trying to soothe. "Hey, hey, hey." But, compared with his stormy roar, her words are those of a backup singer—a Shondell, a Pip—a doo-wop ditty. Books, and now more books, continue to fly.

TAKE NOTES.

Is "fainthearted" one word or two? Student prose has wrecked her spelling.

It's one word. Two words—faint hearted—what would that be? The name of a drag queen.

TAKE NOTES.

In the end you suffer alone. But at the beginning you suffer with a whole lot of others. When your child has cancer you are instantly whisked away to another planet: one of bald-headed little boys. Pediatric Oncology. Peed-Onk. You wash your hands for thirty seconds in antibacterial soap before you are allowed to enter through the swinging doors. You put paper slippers on your shoes. You keep your voice down. "Almost all the children are boys," one of the nurses says. "No one knows why. It's been documented, but a lot of people out there still don't realize it." The little boys are all from sweet-sounding places, Janesville and Appleton—little heartland towns with giant landfills, agricultural runoff, paper factories, Joe McCarthy's grave. (Alone a site of great toxicity, thinks the Mother. The soil should be tested.)

All the bald little boys look like brothers. They wheel their I.V.s up and down the single corridor of Peed-Onk. Some of the lively ones, feeling good for a day, ride the lower bars of their I.V.s while their large, cheerful mothers whizz them along the halls. *Wheee!*

THE Mother does not feel large and cheerful. In her mind she is scathing, acid-tongued, wraith-thin, and chain-smoking out on a fire escape somewhere. Below her lie the gentle undulations of the Midwest, with all its aspirations to be—to be what? To be Long Island. How it has succeeded! Strip mall upon strip mall. Lurid water, poisoned potatoes. The Mother drags deeply, blowing clouds of smoke out over the disfigured cornfields. When a baby gets cancer, it seems stupid ever to have given up smoking. When a baby gets cancer, you think, Whom are we kidding? Let's all light up. When a baby gets cancer, you think, Who came up with *this* idea? What celestial abandon gave rise to *this*? Pour me a drink, so I can refuse to toast.

The Mother does not know how to be one of these other mothers, with their blond hair and sweatpants and sneakers and determined pleasantness. She does not think that she can be anything similar. She does not feel remotely like them. She knows, for instance, too many people in Greenwich Village. She mail-orders oysters and tiramisù from a shop in SoHo. She is close friends with four actual homosexuals. Her husband is asking her to Take Notes.

Where do these women get their sweatpants? She will find out.

She will start, perhaps, with the costume and work from there.

She will live according to the bromides: Take one day at a time. Take a positive attitude. *Take a hike!* She wishes that there were more interesting things that were useful and true, but it seems now that it's only the boring things that are useful and true. *One day at a time.* And *At least we have our health.* How ordinary. How obvious. One day at a time: you need a brain for that?

WHILE the Surgeon is fine-boned, regal, and laconic—they have correctly guessed his game to be doubles—there is a bit of the mad, over-caffeinated scientist to the Oncologist. He speaks quickly. He knows a lot of studies and numbers. He can do the math. Good! Someone should be able to do the math! "It's a fast but wimpy tumor," he explains. "It typically metastasizes to the lung." He rattles off some numbers, time frames, risk statistics. Fast but wimpy: the Mother tries to imagine this combination of traits, tries to think and think, and can only come up with Claudia Osk from the fourth grade, who blushed and almost wept when called on in class but in gym could outrun everyone in the quarter-mile, fire-door-to-fence dash. The Mother thinks now of this tumor as Claudia Osk. They are going to get Claudia Osk, make her sorry. All right! Claudia Osk must die. Though it has never been mentioned before, it now seems clear that Claudia Osk should have died long ago. Who was she, anyway? So conceited, not letting anyone beat her in a race. Well, hey, hey, hey—don't look now, Claudia!

The Husband nudges her. "Are you listening?"

"The chances of this happening even just to one kidney are one in fifteen thousand. Now, given all these other factors, the chances on the second kidney are about one in eight."

"One in eight," says the Husband. "Not bad. As long as it's not one in fifteen thousand."

The Mother studies the trees and fish along the ceiling's edge in the Save the Planet wallpaper border. Save the Planet. Yes! But the windows in this very building don't open, and diesel fumes are leaking into the ventilating system, near which, outside, a delivery truck is parked. The air is nauseous and stale.

"Really," the Oncologist is saying, "of all the cancers he could get, this is probably one of the best."

"We win," says the Mother.

" 'Best,' I know, hardly seems the right word. Look, you two probably need to get some rest. We'll see how the surgery and histology go. Then we'll start with chemo the week following. A little light chemo: vincristine and—"

"Vincristine?" interrupts the Mother. "Wine of Christ?"

"The names are strange, I know. The other one we use is actinomycin-D. Sometimes called dactinomycin. People move the 'D' around to the front."

"They move the 'D' around to the front," repeats the Mother.

"Yup," the Oncologist says. "I don't know why, they just do!"

"Christ didn't survive his wine," says the Husband.

"But of course he did," says the Oncologist and nods toward the Baby, who has now found a cupboard full of hospital linens and bandages and is yanking them all out onto the floor. "I'll see you guys tomorrow, after the surgery." And with that the Oncologist leaves.

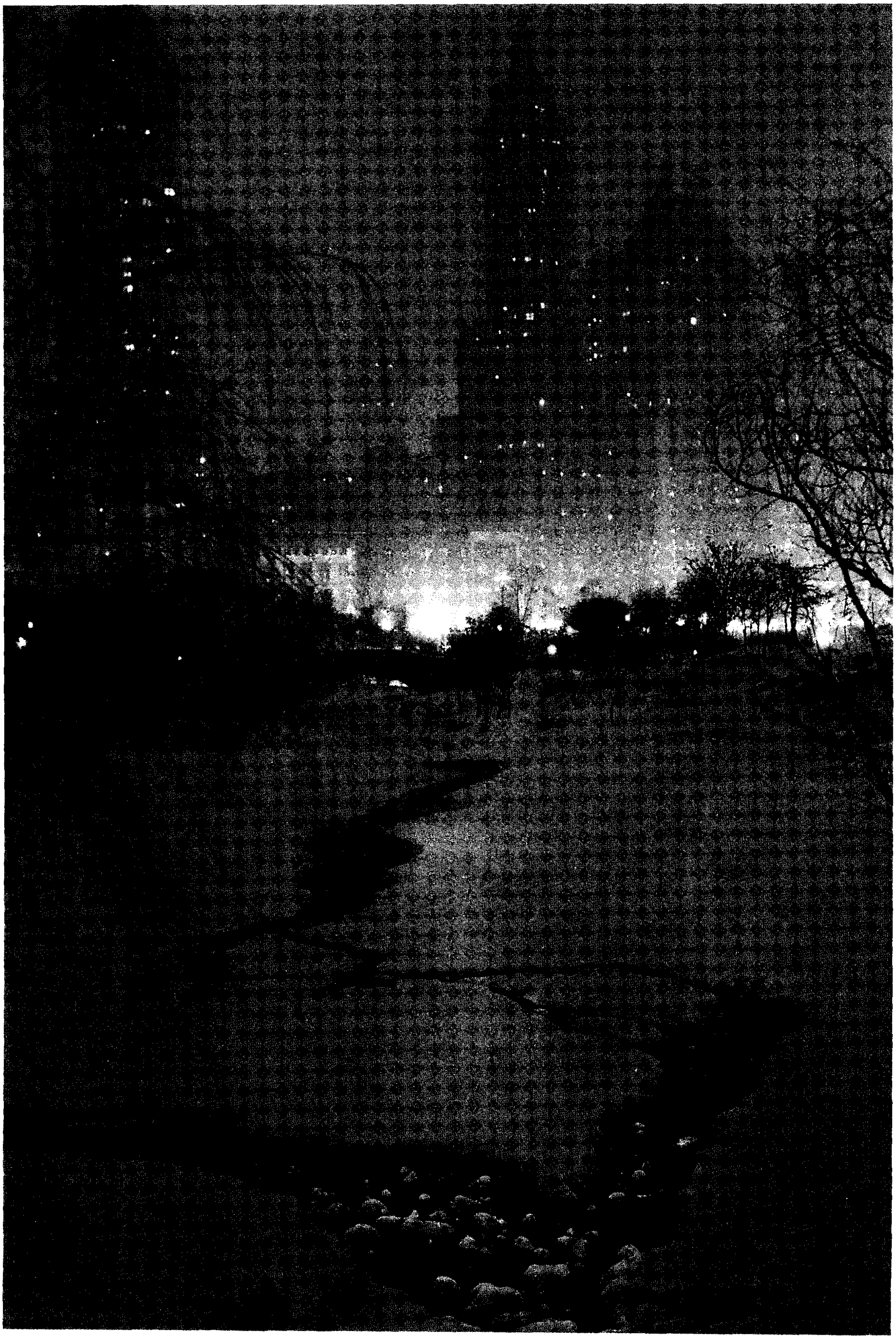
"Or, rather, Christ was his wine," mumbles the Husband. Everything he knows about the New Testament he has gleaned from the soundtrack of "Godspell." "His blood was the wine. What a great beverage idea."

"A little light chemo. Don't you like that one?" says the Mother. "*Eine kleine* dactinomycin. I'd like to see Mozart write that one up for a big wad o' cash."

"Come here, honey," the Husband says

SLOW DAZZLE

As early as 1939, Adolf Fassbender (1884-1980) seemed galled by the state of photography. "Maybe times, conditions have something to do with it," he complained. "Speed, restlessness, ambitions." The twentieth century was overtaking him. His Pictorialist œuvre was resolutely old-fashioned, although he refocussed the movement's first wave (from the turn of the century) with a sharper, modernist lyricism. "The White Night," made on Christmas Eve, 1932, in Central Park, during a late-afternoon blizzard, is one of the highlights of the Fassbender show opening this week at Gallery 292, in SoHo. The buildings on the Plaza were invisible but for a faint glow; the artist got off just one three-and-a-half-minute exposure before his shutter froze. Out of raging wind and snow he coaxed this woolly, lamplit nocturne—a tribute not to speed but to contentment and rest.



"Ah, Harding—perhaps you can give us some input from the straight community."

• •

to the Baby, who has now pulled off both his shoes.

"It's bad enough when they refer to medical science as an inexact science," says the Mother. "But when they start referring to it as an art I get extremely nervous."

"Yeah. If we wanted art, Doc, we'd go to an art museum." The Husband picks up the Baby. "You're an artist," he says to the Mother with the taint of accusation in his voice. "They probably think you find creativity reassuring."

The Mother sighs. "I just find it inevitable. Let's go get something to eat." And so they take the elevator to the cafeteria, where there is a high chair, and where, not noticing, they all eat a lot of apples with the price tags still on them.

BECAUSE his surgery is not until tomorrow, the Baby likes the hospital. He likes the long corridors, down which he can run. He likes everything on wheels. The flower carts in the lobby! ("Please keep your boy away from the flowers," says the vender. "We'll buy the whole display," snaps the Mother, adding, "Actual children in a children's hospital—unbelievable, isn't it?") The Baby likes the other little boys. Places to go! People to see! Rooms to wander into! There is Intensive Care. There is the Trauma Unit. The Baby smiles and waves. What a little Cancer Personality! Bandaged citizens smile and wave back. In Peed-Onk there are the bald little boys to play with. Joey, Eric, Tim, Mort, and Tod. (Mort! Tod!) There is the four-year-old, Ned, holding his little deflated rubber ball, the one with the intriguing curling hose. The Baby wants to play with it. "It's mine, leave it alone," says Ned. "Tell the baby to leave it alone."

"Baby, you've got to share," says the Mother from a chair some feet away.

Suddenly, from down near the Tiny Tim Lounge, comes Ned's mother, large and blond and sweatpanted. "Stop that! Stop it!" she cries out, dashing toward the Baby and Ned and pushing the Baby away. "Don't touch that!" she barks at the Baby, who is only a baby and bursts into tears because he has never been yelled at like this before.

Ned's mom glares at everyone. "This is drawing fluid from Neddy's liver!" She pats at the rubber thing and starts to cry a little.

"Oh, my God," says the Mother. She comforts the Baby, who is also crying. She and Ned, the only dry-eyed people, look at each other. "I'm so sorry," she says to Ned and then to his mother. "I'm so stupid. I thought they were squabbling over a toy."

"It does look like a toy," agrees Ned. He smiles. He is an angel. All the little boys are angels. Total, sweet, bald little angels, and now God is trying to get them back for himself. Who are they, mere mortal women, in the face of this, this powerful and overwhelming and inscrutable thing, God's will? They are the mothers, that's who. You can't have him! they shout every day. You dirty old man! *Get out of here! Hands off!*

"I'm so sorry," says the Mother again. "I didn't know."

Ned's mother smiles vaguely. "Of course you didn't know," she says, and walks back to the Tiny Tim Lounge.

THE Tiny Tim Lounge is a little sitting area at the end of the Peed-Onk corridor. There are two small sofas, a table, a rocking chair, a television, and a VCR. There are various videos: "Speed," "Dune," "Star Wars." On one of the lounge walls there is a gold plaque with the musician Tiny Tim's name on it: years ago, his son was treated at this hospital, and so he donated money for this lounge. It is a cramped little lounge, which one suspects would be larger if Tiny Tim's son had actually lived. Instead, he died here, at this hospital, and now there is this tiny room which is part gratitude, part generosity, part *Fuck you.*

Sifting through the videocassettes, the Mother wonders what science fiction could begin to compete with the science fiction of cancer itself: a tumor, with its differentiated muscle and bone cells, a clump of wild nothing and its mad, ambitious desire to be something—something inside you, instead of you, another organism but with a monster's architecture, a demon's sabotage and chaos. Think of leukemia, a tumor diabolically taking liquid form, the better to swim about incognito in the blood. George Lucas, direct that!

Sitting with the other parents in the Tiny Tim Lounge, the night before the surgery, having put the Baby to bed in his high steel crib two rooms down, the Mother begins to hear the stories: leukemia in kindergarten, sarcomas in Little League, neuroblastomas discovered at summer camp. *Eric slid into third base, but then the scrape didn't heal.* The parents pat one another's forearms and speak of other children's hospitals as if they were resorts. "You were at St. Jude's last winter? So were we. What did you think of it? We loved the staff." Jobs have been quit, marriages hacked up, bank accounts ravaged; the parents have seemingly endured the unendurable. They speak not of the *possibility* of comas brought on by the chemo but of the *number* of them. "He was in his first coma last July," says Ned's mother. "It was a scary time, but we pulled through."

Pulling through is what people do around here. There is a kind of bravery in their lives that isn't bravery at all. It is automatic, unflinching, a mix of man and machine, consuming and unquestionable obligation meeting illness move for move in a giant, even-Steven game of chess: an unending round of something that looks like shadowboxing—though between love and death, which is the shadow? "Everyone admires us for our courage," says one man. "They have no idea what they're talking about."

I could get out of here, thinks the Mother. I could just get on a bus and go, never come back. Change my name. A kind of witness-relocation thing.

"Courage requires options," the man adds.

The Baby might be better off.

"There are options," says a woman with a thick suède headband. "You could give up. You could fall apart."

"No, you can't. Nobody does. I've never seen it," says the man. "Well, not *really* fall apart." Then the lounge is quiet. Over the VCR someone has taped the fortune from a fortune cookie. *Optimism,* it says, *is what allows a teakettle to sing though up to its neck in hot water.* Underneath, someone else has taped a clipping from a summer horoscope. *Cancer rules!* it says. Who would tape this up? Somebody's twelve-year-old brother. One of the fathers—Joey's father—gets up and tears them both off, makes a small wad in his fist.

There is some rustling of magazine pages.

The Mother clears her throat. "Tiny Tim forgot the wet bar," she says.

Ned, who is still up, comes out of his room and down the corridor, whose lights dim at nine. Standing next to the Mother's chair, he says to her, "Where are you from? What is wrong with your baby?"

IN the little room that is theirs, she sleeps fitfully in her sweatpants, occasionally leaping up to check on the Baby. This is what the sweatpants are for: leaping. In case of fire. In case of anything. In case the difference between day and night starts to dissolve and there is no difference at all so why pretend. In the cot beside her the Husband, who has taken a sleeping pill, is snoring loudly, his arms folded about his head in a kind of origami. How could either of them have stayed back at the house, with its empty high chair and empty crib? Occasionally the Baby wakes and cries out, and she bolts up, goes to him, rubs his back, rearranges the linens. The clock on the metal dresser shows that it is five after three. Then twenty to five. And then it is really morning, the beginning of this day, Nephrectomy Day. Will she be glad when it's over, or barely alive, or both? Each day of this week has arrived huge, empty, and unknown, like a spaceship, and this one especially is lit an incandescent gray.

"He'll need to put this on," says John, one of the nurses, bright and early, handing the Mother a thin greenish garment with roses and Teddy bears printed on it. A wave of nausea hits her: this smock, she thinks, will soon be splattered with—with what?

The Baby is awake but drowsy. She lifts off his pajamas. "Don't forget, *bubeleh,*" she whispers, undressing and dressing him. "We will be with you every moment, every step. When you think you are asleep and floating off far away from everybody, Mommy will still be there." If she hasn't fled on a bus. "Mommy will take care of you. And Daddy, too." She hopes the Baby does not detect her own fear and uncertainty, which she must hide from him, like a limp. He is hungry, not having been allowed to eat, and he is no longer amused by this new place but worried about its hardships. Oh, my baby, she thinks. And the room starts to swim

"Another piss and vinegar?"

a little. The Husband comes in to take over. "Take a break," he says to her. "I'll walk him around for five minutes."

She leaves but doesn't know where to go. In the hallway she is approached by a kind of social worker, a customer-relations person, who had given them a video to watch about the anesthesia: how the parent accompanies the child into the operating room, and how gently, nicely the drugs are administered.

"Did you watch the video?"

"Yes," says the Mother.

"Wasn't it helpful?"

"I don't know," says the Mother.

"Do you have any questions?" asks the video woman. *Do you have any questions*? asked of someone who has recently landed in this fearful, alien place seems to the Mother an absurd and amazing little courtesy. The very specificity of a question would give the lie to the overwhelming strangeness of everything around her.

"Not right now," says the Mother. "Right now I think I'm just going to go to the bathroom."

When she comes back to the Baby's room, everyone is there: the Surgeon, the Anesthesiologist, all the nurses, the social worker. In their blue caps and scrubs they look like a clutch of forget-me-nots, and forget them who could? The Baby, in his little Teddy-bear smock, seems cold and scared. He reaches out and the Mother lifts him from the Husband's arms, rubs his back to warm him.

"Well, it's time!" says the Surgeon, forcing a smile.

"Shall we go?" says the Anesthesiologist.

What follows is a blur of obedience and bright lights. They take an elevator down to a big concrete room, the anteroom, the greenroom, the backstage of the operating room. Lining the walls are long shelves full of blue surgical outfits. "Children often become afraid of the color blue," one of the nurses says. But of course. Of course! "Now, which one of you would like to come into the operating room for the anesthesia?"

"I will," says the Mother.

"Are you sure?" says the Husband.

"Yup." She kisses the Baby's hair. Mr. Curlyhead people keep calling him here, and it seems both rude and nice. Women look admiringly at his long lashes and exclaim, "Always the boys! Always the boys!"

Two surgical nurses put a blue smock and a blue cotton cap on the Mother. The Baby finds this funny and keeps pulling at the cap. "This way," says another nurse, and the Mother follows. "Just put the Baby down on the table."

In the video, the mother holds the baby and fumes from the mask are gently waved under the baby's nose until he falls asleep. Now, out of view of camera or social worker, the Anesthesiologist is anxious to get this under way and not let too much gas leak out into the room generally. The occupational hazard of this, his chosen profession, is gas exposure and nerve damage, and it has started to worry him. No doubt he frets about it to his wife every night. Now he turns the gas on and quickly clamps the plastic mouthpiece over the Baby's cheeks and lips.

The Baby is startled. The Mother is startled. The Baby starts to scream and redden behind the plastic, but he cannot be heard. He thrashes. "Tell him it's O.K.," says the nurse to the Mother.

O.K.? "It's O.K.," repeats the Mother, holding his hand, but she knows he can tell it's not O.K., because he can see that not only is she still wearing that stupid paper cap but her words are mechanical and swallowed, and she is biting her lips to keep them from trembling. Panicked, he attempts to sit, he cannot breathe, his arms reach up. *Bye-bye*, *outside*. And then, quite quickly, his eyes shut, he untenses and has fallen not into sleep but aside to sleep, an odd, kidnapping kind of sleep, his terror now hidden someplace deep inside him.

"How did it go?" asks the social worker, waiting in the concrete outer room. The Mother is hysterical. A nurse has ushered her out.

"It wasn't at all like the film strip!" she cries. "It wasn't like the film strip at all!"

"The film strip? You mean the video?" asks the social worker.

"It wasn't like that at all! It was brutal and unforgivable."

"Why, that's terrible," she says, her role now no longer misinformational but janitorial, and she touches the Mother's arm. The Mother shakes her off and goes to find the Husband.

She finds him in the large mulberry Surgery Lounge, where he has been taken and where there is free hot chocolate in small plastic-foam cups. Red cellophane garlands festoon the doorways. She has totally forgotten it is as close to Christmas as this. A pianist in the corner is playing "Carol of the Bells," and it sounds not only unfestive but scary, like the theme from "The Exorcist."

There is a giant clock on the far wall. It is a kind of porthole into the operating room, a way of assessing the Baby's ordeal: forty-five minutes for the Hickman implant; two and a half hours for the nephrectomy. And then, after that, three months of chemotherapy. The magazine on her lap stays open at a ruby-hued perfume ad.

"Still not taking notes," says the Husband.

"Nope."

"You know, in a way, this is the kind of thing you've *always* written about."

"You are really something, you know that? This is life. This isn't a 'kind of thing.' "

"But this is the kind of thing that fiction is: it's the unlivable life, the strange room tacked on to the house, the extra moon that is circling the earth unbeknownst to science."

"I told you that."

"I'm quoting you."

She looks at her watch, thinking of the Baby. "How long has it been?"

"Not long. Too long. In the end, those're the same things."

"What do you suppose is happening to him right this second?"

Infection? Slipping knives? "I don't know. But you know what? I've gotta go. I've gotta just walk a bit." The Husband gets up, walks around the lounge, then comes back and sits down.

The synapses between the minutes are unswimmable. An hour is thick as fudge. The Mother feels depleted; she is a string of empty tin cans attached by wire, something a goat would sniff and chew, something now and then enlivened by a jolt of electricity.

She hears their names being called over the intercom. "Yes? Yes?" She stands up quickly. Her voice has flown out before her, an exhalation of birds. The piano music has stopped. The pianist is gone. She and the Husband approach the main desk, where a man looks up at them and smiles. Before him is a Xeroxed list of patients' names. "That's our little boy right there," says the Mother, seeing the Baby's name on the list and pointing at it. "Is there some word? Is everything O.K.?"

"Yes," says the man. "Your boy is doing fine. They've just finished with the catheter and they are moving on to the kidney."

"But it's been two hours already! Oh, my God, did something go wrong, what happened, what went wrong?"

"Did something go wrong?" The Husband tugs at his collar.

"Not really. It just took longer than they expected. I'm told everything is fine. They wanted you to know."

"Thank you," says the Husband. They turn and walk back toward where they were sitting.

"I'm not going to make it," sighs the Mother, sinking into a fake-leather chair shaped somewhat like a baseball mitt. "But before I go I'm taking half this hospital out with me."

"Do you want some coffee?" asks the Husband.

"I don't know," says the Mother. "No, I guess not. No. Do you?"

"Nah, I don't, either, I guess," he says. "Would you like part of an orange?"

"Oh, maybe, I guess, if you're having one." She takes a temple orange from her purse and just sits there peeling its difficult skin, the flesh rupturing beneath her fingers, the juice trickling down her hands, stinging the hangnails. She and the Husband chew and swallow, discreetly spit the seeds into Kleenex, and read from photocopies of the latest medical research which they begged from the interne. They read, and underline, and sigh and close their eyes, and after some time the surgery is over. A nurse from Peed-Onk comes down to tell them.

"Your little boy's in recovery right now. He's doing well. You can see him in about fifteen minutes."

How can it be described? How can any of it be described? The trip and the story of the trip are always two different things. The narrator is the one who has stayed home but then, afterward, presses her mouth upon the traveller's mouth, in order to make the mouth work, to make the mouth say, say, say. One cannot go to a place and speak of it, one can-

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Vanessa Bell, Portrait of Leonard Sidney Woolf (detail), 1940. National Portrait Gallery, London.

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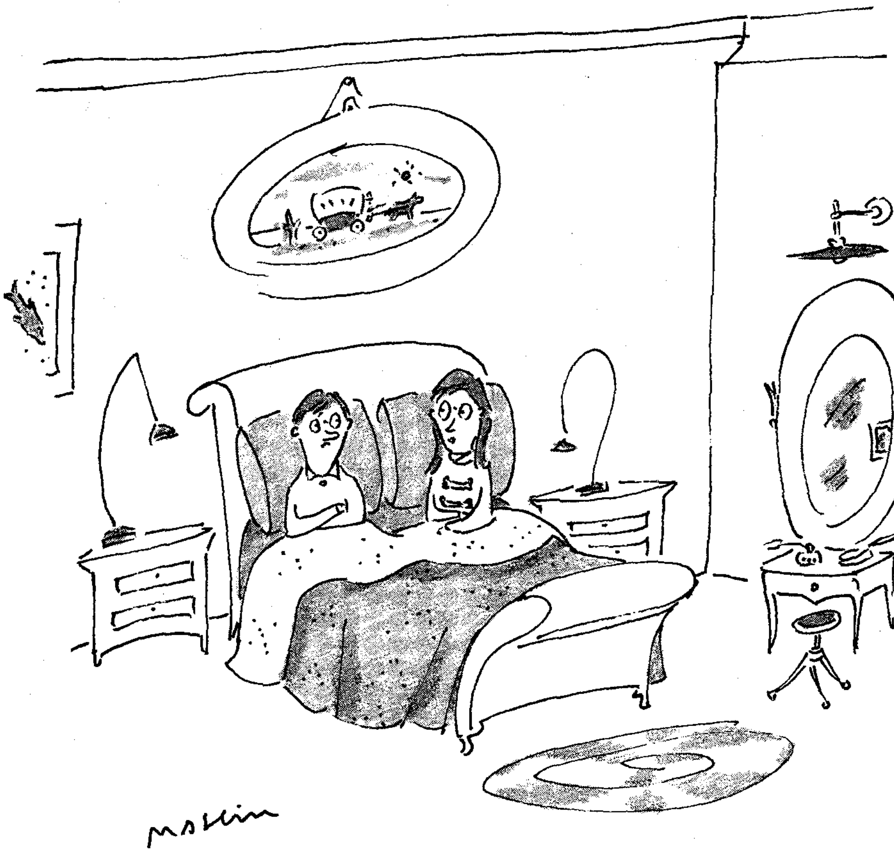

"You're strategically situated, but you're no longer vital to my interests."

• •

not both see and say, not really. One can go, and upon returning make a lot of hand motions and indications with the arms. The mouth itself, working at the speed of light, at the eye's instructions, is necessarily struck still; so fast, so much to report, it hangs open and dumb as a gutted bell. All that unsayable life! That's where the narrator comes in. The narrator comes with her kisses and mimicry and tidying up. The narrator comes and makes a slow, fake song of the mouth's eager devastation.

It is a horror and a miracle to see him. He is lying in his crib in his room, tubed up, splayed like a boy on a cross, his arms stiffened into cardboard "no-no"s so that he cannot yank out the tubes. There is the bladder catheter, the nasal-gastric tube, and the Hickman, which, beneath the skin, is plugged into his jugular, then popped out his chest wall and capped with a long plastic cap. There is a large bandage taped over his abdomen. Groggy, on a morphine drip, still he is able to look at her when, maneuvering through all the vinyl wiring, she leans to hold him, and when she does he begins to cry, but cry silently, without motion or noise. She has never seen a baby cry without motion or noise. It is the crying of an old person: silent, beyond opinion, shattered. In someone so tiny, it is frightening and unnatural. She wants to pick up the Baby and run—out of there, out of there. She wants to whip out a gun: *No-nos, eh? This whole thing is what I call a no-no.* "Don't you touch him!" she wants to shout at the surgeons and the needle nurses. "Not anymore! No more! No more!" She would crawl up and lie beside him in the crib if she could. But instead, because of all his intricate wiring, she must lean and cuddle, sing to him, songs of peril and flight: "We gotta get out of this place, if it's the last thing we ever do. We gotta get out of this place. Baby, there's a better life for me and for you."

Very 1967. She was eleven then, and impressionable.

The Baby looks at her, pleadingly, his arms outstretched in surrender. To where? Where is there to go? Take me! Take me!

THAT night, post-op night, the Mother and the Husband lie afloat in their cots. A fluorescent lamp near the crib is kept on in the dark. The Baby breathes evenly but thinly in his drugged sleep. The morphine in its first flooding doses apparently makes him feel as if he were falling backward—or so the Mother has been told—and it causes the Baby to jerk, to catch himself over and over, as if he were being dropped from a tree. "Is this right? Isn't there something that should be done?" The nurses come in hourly, different ones—the night shifts seem strangely short and frequent. If the Baby stirs or frets, the nurses give him more morphine through the Hickman catheter, then leave to tend to other patients. The Mother rises to check on him herself in the low light. There is gurgling from the clear plastic suction tube coming out of his mouth. Brownish clumps have collected in the tube. What is going on? The Mother rings for the nurse. Is it Renee or Sarah or Darcy? She's forgotten.

"What, what is it?" murmurs the Husband, waking up.

"Something is wrong," says the Mother. "It looks like blood in his N-G tube."

"What?" The Husband gets out of bed. He, too, is wearing sweatpants.

The nurse—Valerie—pushes open the heavy door to the room and enters quietly. "Everything O.K.?"

"There's something wrong here. The tube is sucking blood out of his stomach. It looks like it may have perforated his stomach and now he's bleeding internally. Look!"

Valerie is a saint, but her voice is the standard hospital saint voice: an infuriating, pharmaceutical calm. It says, *Everything is normal here. Death is normal. Pain is normal. Nothing is abnormal. So there is nothing to get excited about.* "Well, now, let's see." She holds up the plastic tube and tries to see inside it. "Hmm," she says. "I'll call the attending physician."

Because this is a research and teaching hospital, all the regular doctors are at home sleeping in their Mission-style beds. Tonight, as is apparently the case every weekend night, the attending physician is a medical student. He looks fifteen. The authority he attempts to convey he cannot remotely inhabit. He is not even in the same building with it. He shakes everyone's hand, then strokes his chin, a gesture no doubt gleaned from some piece of dinner theatre his parents took him to once. As if there were an actual beard on that chin! As if beard growth on that chin were even possible! "Our Town"! "Kiss Me Kate"! "Barefoot

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in the Park"! He is attempting to convince if not to impress.

"We're in trouble," the Mother whispers to the Husband. She is tired, tired of young people grubbing for grades. "We've got Dr. 'Kiss Me Kate' here."

The Husband looks at her blankly, a mixture of disorientation and divorce.

The medical student holds the tubing in his hands. "I don't really see anything," he says.

He flunks! "You don't?" The Mother shoves her way in, holds the clear tubing in both hands. "That," she says. "Right here and here." Just this past semester she said to one of her own students, "If you don't see how this essay is better than that one, then I want you to just go out into the hallway and stand there until you do." Is it important to keep one's voice down? The Baby stays asleep. He is drugged and dreaming, far away.

"Hmm," says the medical student. "Perhaps there's a little irritation in the stomach."

"A little irritation?" The Mother grows furious. "This is blood. These are clumps and clots. This stupid thing is sucking the life right out of him!" Life! She is starting to cry.

They turn off the suction and bring in antacids, which they feed into the Baby through the tube. Then they turn the suction on again. This time on "low."

"What was it on before?" asks the Husband.

"High," says Valerie. "Doctor's orders, though I don't know why. I don't know why these doctors do a lot of the things they do."

"Maybe they're—not all that bright?" suggests the Mother. She is feeling relief and rage simultaneously: there is a feeling of prayer and litigation in the air. Yet essentially she is grateful. Isn't she? She thinks she is. And still, and still: look at all the things you have to do to protect a child, a hospital merely an intensification of life's cruel obstacle course.

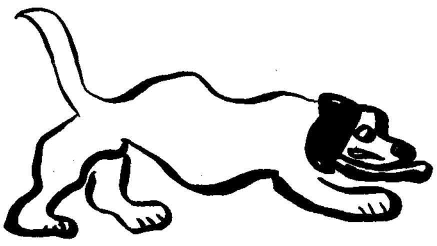
The Surgeon comes to visit on Saturday morning. He steps in and nods at the Baby, who is awake but glazed from the morphine, his eyes two dark, unseeing grapes. "The boy looks fine," he announces. He peeks under the Baby's bandage. "The stitches look good," he says. The Baby's abdomen is stitched all the way across, like a baseball. "And the other kidney, when we looked at it yesterday face to face, looked fine. We'll try to wean him off the morphine a little, and see how he's doing on Monday."

"Is he going to be O.K.?"

"The boy? The boy is going to be fine," he says, then taps her stiffly on the shoulder. "Now, you take care. It's Saturday. Drink a little wine."

Over the weekend, while the Baby sleeps, the Mother and the Husband sit together in the Tiny Tim Lounge. The Husband is restless and makes cafeteria and sundry runs, running errands for everyone. In his absence, the other parents regale her further with their sagas. Pediatric cancer and chemo stories: the children's amputations, blood poisoning, teeth flaking like shale, the learning delays and disabilities caused by chemo frying the young, budding brain. But strangely optimistic codas are tacked on: endings as stiff and loopy as carpenter's lace, crisp and empty as lettuce, reticulate as a net—ah, words. "After all that business with the tutor, he's better now, and fitted with new incisors by my wife's cousin's husband, who did dental school in two and a half years, if you can believe that. We hope for the best. We take things as they come. Life is hard."

"Life's a big problem," agrees the Mother. Part of her welcomes and invites all their tales. In the few long days since this nightmare began, part of her has become addicted to disaster and war stories. She only wants to hear about the sadness and emergencies of others. They are the only situations that can join hands with her own; everything else bounces off her shiny shield of resentment and unsympathy. Nothing else can even stay in her brain. From this, no doubt, the philistine world is made, or should one say recruited? Together the parents huddle all day in the Tiny Tim Lounge—no need to watch "Oprah." They leave "Oprah" in the dust. "Oprah" has nothing on them. They chat matter-of-factly, then fall silent and watch "Dune" or "Star Wars," in which there are bright and shiny robots, whom the Mother now sees not as robots at all but as human beings who have had terrible things happen to them.



Some of their friends visit with stuffed animals and soft "Looking good"s for the dozing baby, though the room is way past the stuffed-animal limit. The Mother arranges, once more, a plateful of Mint Milano cookies and cups of takeout coffee for guests. All her nutso pals stop by—the two on Prozac, the one obsessed with the word "penis" in the word "happiness," the one who recently had her hair foiled green. "Your friends put the *de* in *fin de siècle*," says the Husband. Overheard, or recorded, all marital conversation sounds as if someone must be joking, though usually no one is.

She loves her friends, especially loves them for coming, since there are times they all fight and don't speak for weeks. Is this friendship? For now and here, it must do and is, and is, she swears it is. For one, they never offer impromptu spiritual lectures about death, how it is part of life, its natural ebb and flow, how we all must accept that, or other such utterances that make her want to scratch out somebody's eyes. Like true friends, they take no hardy or elegant stance loosely choreographed from some broad perspective. They get right in there and mutter "Jesus Christ!" and shake their heads. Plus, they are the only people who will not only laugh at her stupid jokes but offer up stupid ones of their own. *What do you get when you cross Tiny Tim with a pit bull*? A child's illness is a strain on the mind. They know how to laugh in a flutey, desperate way—unlike the people who are more her husband's friends and who seem just to deepen their sorrowful gazes, nodding their heads in Sympathy. How Exiling and Estranging are everybody's Sympathetic Expressions! When anyone laughs, she thinks, O.K. Hooray! A buddy. In disaster as in show business.

Nurses come and go; their chirpy voices both startle and soothe. Some of the other Peed-Onk parents stick their heads in to see how the Baby is and offer encouragement.

Green Hair scratches her head: "Everyone's so friendly here. Is there someone in this place who isn't doing all this airy, scripted optimism—or are people like that the only people here?"

"It's Modern Middle Medicine meets the Modern Middle Family," says the Husband. "In the Modern Middle West."

Someone has brought in takeout lo mein, and they all eat it out in the hall by the elevators.

PARENTS are allowed use of the Courtesy Line.

"You've got to have a second child," says a friend on the phone, a friend from out of town. "An heir and a spare. That's what we did. We had another child to insure we wouldn't off ourselves if we lost our first."

"Really?"

"I'm serious."

"A formal suicide? Wouldn't you just drink yourself into a lifelong stupor and let it go at that?"

"Nope. I knew how I would do it even. For a while, until our second came along, I had it all planned."

"You did? What did you plan?"

"I can't go into too much detail, because—hi, honey!—the kids are here now in the room. But I'll spell out the general idea: R-O-P-E."

SUNDAY evening she goes and sinks down on the sofa in the Tiny Tim Lounge next to Frank, Joey's father. He is a short, stocky man with the currentless, flat-lined look behind the eyes that all the parents eventually get here. He has shaved his head bald in solidarity with his son. His little boy has been battling cancer for five years. It is now in the liver, and the rumor around the corridor is that Joey has three weeks to live. She knows that Joey's mother, Roseanne, left Frank years ago, two years into the cancer, and has remarried and had another child, a girl named Brittany. The Mother sees Roseanne here sometimes with her new life—the cute little girl and the new full-haired husband, who will never be so maniacally and debilitatingly obsessed with Joey's illness the way Frank, her first husband, is. Roseanne comes to visit Joey, to say hello and now goodbye, but she is not Joey's main man. Frank is.

Frank is full of stories—about the doctors, about the food, about the nurses, about Joey. Joey, affectless from his meds, sometimes leaves his room and comes out to watch TV in his bathrobe. He is jaundiced and bald, and though he is nine he looks no older than six. Frank has devoted the last four and a half years to saving Joey's life. When the cancer was first diagnosed, the doctors gave Joey a twenty-per-cent chance of living six more months. Now here it is almost five years later, and Joey's still here. It is all due to Frank, who, early on, quit his job as vice-president of a consulting firm in order to commit himself totally to his son. He is proud of everything he's given up and done, but he is tired. Part of him now really believes that things are coming to a close, that this is the end. He says this without tears. There are no more tears.

"You have probably been through more than anyone else on this corridor," says the Mother.

"I could tell you stories," he says. There is a sour odor between them, and she realizes that neither of them has bathed for days.

"Tell me one. Tell me the worst one." She knows he hates his ex-wife and hates her new husband even more.

"The worst? They're all the worst. Here's one: one morning I went out for breakfast with my buddy—it was the only time I'd left Joey alone ever, left him for two hours is all—and when I came back his N-G tube was full of blood. They had the suction on too high, and it was sucking the guts right out of him."

"Oh, my God. That just happened to us," said the Mother.

"It did?"

"Friday night."

"You're kidding. They let that happen again? I gave them such a chewing out about that!"

"I guess our luck is not so good. We get your very worst story on the second night we're here."

"It's not a bad place, though."

"It's not?"

"Naw. I've seen worse. I've taken Joey everywhere."

"He seems very strong." Truth is, at this point Joey seems like a zombie and frightens her.

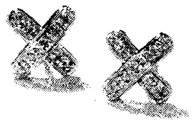
"Joey's a fucking genius. A biological genius. They'd given him six months, remember."

The Mother nods.

"Six months is not very long," says Frank. "Six months is nothing. He was four and a half years old."

All the words are like blows. She feels flooded with affection and mourning for this man. She looks away, out the window, out past the hospital parking lot, up toward the black marbled sky and the electric eyelash of the moon. "And now he's nine," she says. "You're his hero."

"And he's mine," says Frank, though



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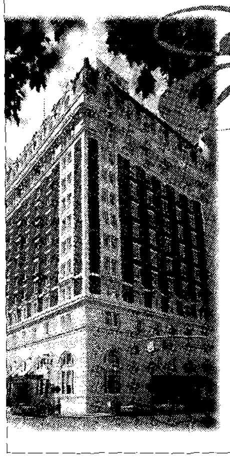

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the fatigue in his voice seems to overwhelm him. "He'll be that forever. Excuse me," he says. "I've got to go check. His breathing hasn't been good. Excuse me."

"GOOD news and bad," says the Oncologist on Monday. He has knocked, entered the room, and now stands there. Their cots are unmade. One wastebasket is overflowing with coffee cups. "We've got the pathologist's report. The bad news is that the kidney they removed had certain lesions, called 'rests,' which are associated with a higher risk for disease in the other kidney. The good news is that the tumor is Stage I, regular cell structure, and under five hundred grams, which qualifies you for a national experiment in which chemotherapy isn't done but your boy is simply monitored with ultrasound. It's not all that risky, given that the patient's watched closely, but here is the literature on it. There are forms to sign, if you decide to do that. Read all this and we can discuss it further. You have to decide within four days."

Lesions? Rests? They dry up and scatter like M&M's on the floor. All she hears is the part about no chemo. Another sigh of relief rises up in her and spills out. In a life where there is only the bearable and the unbearable, a sigh of relief is an ecstasy.

"No chemo?" says the husband. "Do you recommend that?"

The Oncologist shrugs. What casual gestures these doctors are permitted! "I know chemo. I like chemo," says the Oncologist. "But this is for you to decide. It depends how you feel."

The Husband leans forward. "But don't you think that now that we have the upper hand with this thing we should keep going? Shouldn't we stomp on it, beat it, smash it to death with the chemo?"

The Mother swats him angrily and hard. "Honey, you're delirious!" She whispers, but it comes out as a hiss. "This is our lucky break." Then she adds gently, "We don't want the Baby to have chemo."

The Husband turns back to the Oncologist. "What do you think?"

"It could be," he says, shrugging. "It could be that this is your lucky break. But you won't know for sure for five years."

The Husband turns back to the Mother. "O.K.," he says. "O.K."

THE Baby grows happier and strong. He begins to move and sit and eat. Wednesday morning they are allowed to leave, and to leave without chemo. The Oncologist looks a little nervous. "Are you nervous about this?" asks the Mother.

"Of course I'm nervous." But he shrugs and doesn't look that nervous. "See you in six weeks for the ultrasound," he says, then he waves and leaves, looking at his big black shoes.

The Baby smiles, even toddles around a little, the sun bursting through the clouds, an angel chorus crescendoing. Nurses arrive. The Hickman is taken out of the Baby's neck and chest, antibiotic lotion is dispensed. The Mother packs up their bags. The baby sucks on a bottle of juice and does not cry.

"No chemo?" says one of the nurses. "Not even a little chemo?"

"We're doing watch-and-wait," says the Mother.

The other parents look envious but concerned. They have never seen any child get out of there with his hair and white blood cells intact.

"Will you be O.K.?" says Ned's mother.

"The worry's going to kill us," says the Husband.

"But if all we have to do is worry," chides the Mother, "every day for a hundred years, it'll be easy. It'll be nothing. I'll take all the worry in the world if it wards off the thing itself."

"That's right," says Ned's mother. "Compared to everything else, compared to all the actual events, the worry is nothing."

The Husband shakes his head. "I'm such an amateur," he moans.

"You're both doing admirably," says the other mother. "Your baby's lucky, and I wish you all the best."

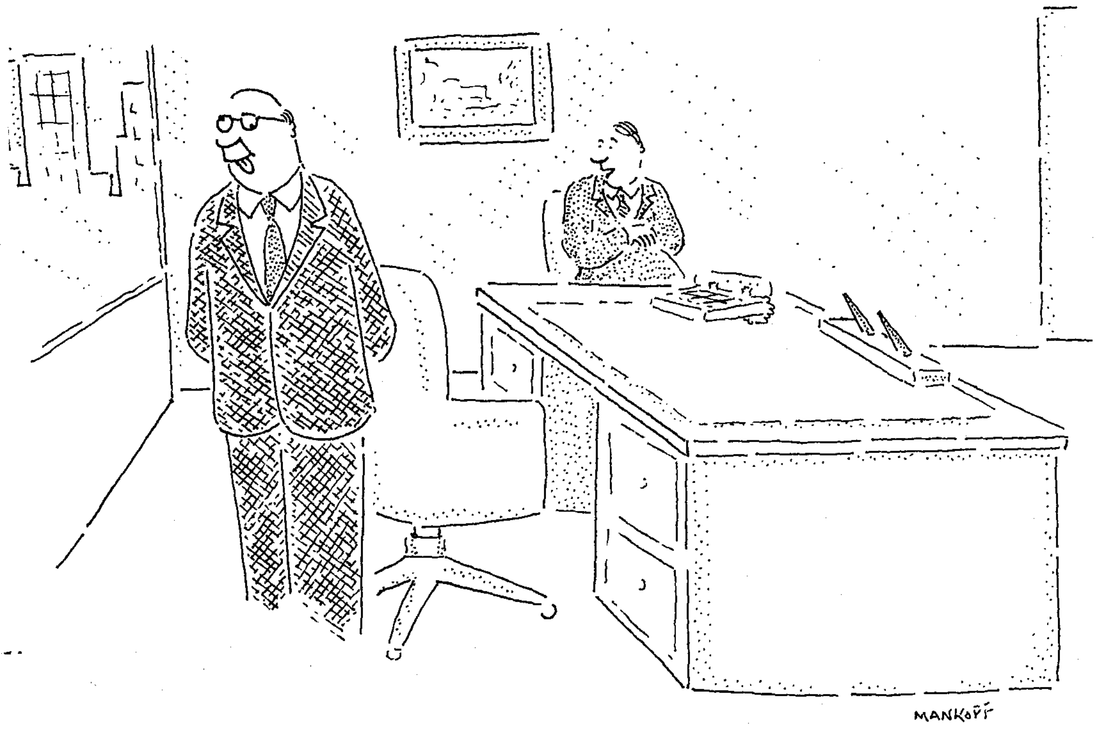
The Husband shakes her hand warmly. "Thank you," he says. "You've been wonderful."

Another mother, the mother of Eric, comes up to them. "It's all very hard," she says, her head cocked to one side. "But there's a lot of collateral beauty along the way."

Collateral beauty? Who is entitled to such a thing? A child is ill. No one is entitled to any collateral beauty.

"Thank you," says the Husband.

Joey's father, Frank, comes up and embraces them both. "It's a journey," he says. He chucks the



"I don't know how you do it. If I had your job, I'd go nuts."

Baby on the chin. "Good luck, little man."

"Yes, thank you so much," says the Mother. "We hope things go well with Joey." She knows that Joey had a hard, terrible night.

Frank shrugs and steps back. "Gotta go," he says. "Goodbye!"

"Bye," she says, and then he is gone. She bites the inside of her lip, a bit teariły, then bends down to pick up the diaper bag, which is now stuffed with little animals; helium balloons are tied to its zipper. Shouldering the thing, the Mother feels she has just won a prize. All the parents have now vanished down the hall in the opposite direction. The Husband moves close. With one arm he takes the Baby from her; with the other he rubs her back. He can see she is starting to get weepy.

"Aren't these people nice? Don't you feel better hearing about their lives?" he asks.

Why does he do this, form clubs all the time—why does even this society of suffering soothe him? When it comes to death and dying, perhaps someone in this family ought to be more of a snob.

"All these nice people with their brave stories," he continues as they make their way toward the elevator bank, waving goodbye to the nursing staff as they go, even the Baby waving shyly. *Bye-bye! Bye-bye!* "Don't you feel consoled, knowing we're all in the same boat, that we're all in this together?"

But who on earth would want to be in this boat? the Mother thinks. This boat is a nightmare boat. Look where it goes: to a silver-and-white room, where, just before your eyesight and hearing and your ability to touch or be touched disappear entirely, you must watch your child die.

Rope! Bring on the rope.

"Let's make our own way," says the Mother, "and not in this boat."

Woman Overboard! She takes the Baby back from the Husband, cups the Baby's cheek in her hand, kisses his brow and then, quickly, his flowery mouth. The Baby's heart—she can hear it—drums with life. "For as long as I live," says the Mother, pressing the elevator button—up or down, everyone in the end has to leave this way—"I never want to see any of these people again."

THERE are the notes.

Now, where is the money? ♦

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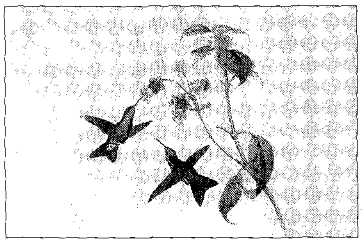

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HOMER'S WOMEN

A politically correct Odyssey turns out to be a very good thing.

BY GARRY WILLS

ROBERT FAGLES is the best living translator of ancient Greek drama, lyric poetry, and epic into modern English, and his translation of the Odyssey (Viking; $35) is his finest work so far. He has certain advantages for this task, among them a lack of supremely competent rivals. The three greatest reworkings of Homer into English poetry based themselves on the Iliad—George Chapman's Iliads (1611), Alexander Pope's Iliad (1720), and Christopher Logue's "War Music," which he began publishing in the nineteen-sixties. Chapman and Pope came later to the Odyssey, and there was a falling off from their intensity in the Iliad (as some say there is in the original poem). Chapman chose a tamer metre to work in (heroic couplets, not the "fourteeners" of his Iliad), which was a sign of his less intimate grappling with the text. Pope invested seven years' work in his Iliad in a gamble to win fame and security. That gamble won, he relaxed into saner working conditions for the Odyssey, farming half of the labor out to collaborators. What was gained for his life was partly lost for his art.

Even if Chapman and Pope had begun their Homeric labors with the Odyssey, it is doubtful whether either man could have made it a more gripping poem than his Iliad. The latter poem spoke more directly to their contemporaries; that is why they began with it. Regal virtues were then more publicly recognized than were domestic ones. Chapman's Renaissance Neoplatonism made him concentrate on the fierce struggle for control over one's passions. Achilles' conflicts with himself and others—the wild ride on his own fury (*menis*)—lent themselves to that kind of philosophical drama. After England's successive dethronements—of Charles and then of James—in the seventeenth century, Pope's countrymen were divided on the nature and the value of kingship. Pope succeeded so well in framing the Trojan struggle as a test of regal behaviors that John Ruskin declared himself a royalist of the school of Pope's Homer—a school that holds that kings should do harder work and get proportionally less reward than other leaders.

The Iliads of Chapman and Pope are great poems because the temper of their own times gave them a language forged for dealing with cognate concerns in the original. That is also why they were not equally successful in all parts of the poem. Chapman does not find the exact distance from his story's passions which Homer achieved with his narrative and metrical devices of control, while Pope is too controlled to show the savagery of gods and heroes. And if part of the Iliad was beyond them much of the Odyssey was unavailable to them and to their audience.

So it is not true that the greatest works of art are timeless in their appeal. Masterpieces go neglected for long periods—as Gothic architecture did in the eighteenth century. Even the finest minds are limited by their historical circumstances. Thomas Jefferson literally could not *see* a Gothic cathedral, much less take it seriously. That is the problem with claims for an immutable canon equally teachable in all times.

Through most of Western history, people were comparatively neglectful or dismissive of the Odyssey, feeling it to be not up to the high heroic raptures of war in the Iliad. In our own, antiheroic times, the reverse has come to be true. It is harder to take seriously the high metaphysical poutiness of Achilles than to admire the "endlessly twisty" (*polytropos*) Odysseus, that flexible cat who always lands on his feet.

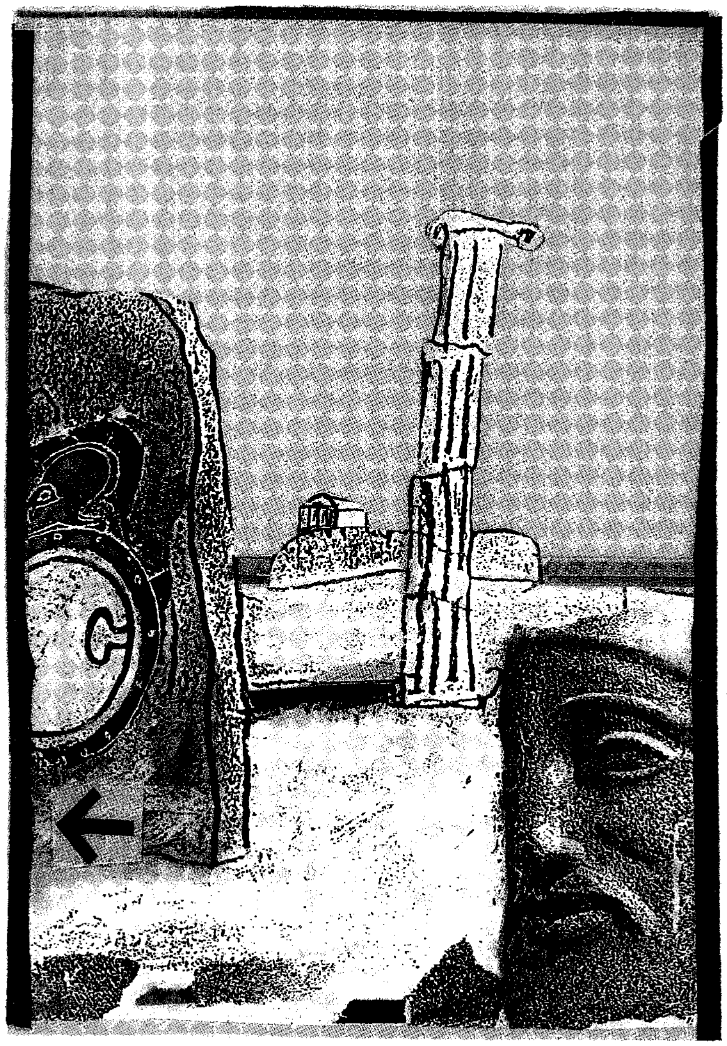
One wonders, then, how Logue's "War Music" succeeds in its current use of the Iliad. He finds a language for war rising out of the colonial struggles in Algeria, Indochina, and the Falklands, those clashes of culture that had all the doomed beauty of empires ending. He wisely chose only those parts of the epic which he could deal with on these terms—the sexiness of war, Helen as a heart-stopping nemesis, the mingled hatred and fascination emanating from her through every aspect of battle. Such stunned up-closeness to war's sickening attractions is what I miss in Fagles's 1990 Iliad, deft and verbally felicitous as it is.

Fagles comes to the Odyssey better equipped, and not because translating it is a lesser task. In some ways, negotiating its jointures of fairy tale with domestic economies is a severe test of verbal tone and tact. The disparities of scale in the Odyssey have always troubled people—the fate of nations and a matron's thrift, the fights with monsters and the tiffs with housemaids. A comedy of manners seems at times to be clanking about in incongruous armor. One minute we are in a Jane Austen novel, the next we are wafted off on Rubaiyat perfumery to be dazzled on the island of Scheria.

The Victorian wit Samuel Butler saw only the Jane Austen side of the tale. Arguing that Penelope's vanity was pleased by the attention of the suitors who had taken residence at Odysseus' palace, that she courted their courting, he points out that it would have been easy for her to get rid of them if she really wanted to. She could, for instance, have bored them out of her house:

> Did she ask Antinous or Eurymachus to sit to her for her web—give them a good stiff pose, make them stick to it, and talk to them all the time? Did she find errands for them to run, and then scold them, and say she did not want them? or make them do commissions for her and forget to pay them, or keep on sending them back to the shop to change things, and they had given ever so much too much money and she wished she had gone and done it herself? Did she insist on their attending family worship?

That is from Butler's book "The Authoress of the Odyssey," where, as usual, he is playing several games at once. He is making fun of the Victorians' own great epic, Lord Tennyson's Arthuriad. He hints several times that the "authoress" of the Odyssey watered down Homer's bold Iliad into very weak tea, as the "authoress" of the "Idylls of the King" diluted Malory's strong "Le Morte d'Arthur."



The Odyssey is the part of Homer we are best equipped to appreciate.

EUGENE MIHAESCO

Butler is also reducing to absurdity the conventional view that the Odyssey, devoted in large part to the "woman's world" of the home, is for that reason an inferior poem. He pays no compliment to women in saying that one wrote the Odyssey. She is a "man hatress," though she goes a little gaga over Odysseus' son, Telemachus. She makes excuses for Helen but is preachy toward men. After translating some of Athena's nagging advice, Butler remarks, "I had a very dear kind old aunt who when I was a boy used to talk to me just in this way. 'Unstable as water,' she would say, 'thou shalt not excel.' I almost heard her saying it (and more to the same effect) when I was translating the passage above given. My uncles did not talk to me at all in the same way."

Butler's clever but dismissive game of finding women's concerns throughout the Odyssey is now being played in earnest. The best part of Bernard Knox's deeply learned introduction to Fagles's translation is its treatment of the epic's women. He is able to draw on a large body of work in this area, since women's studies have affected Homeric scholarship along with so many other things. Columbia University's Helene Foley, for instance, has demonstrated that Penelope, far from being a "patient Griselda," who just sits and weaves and waits for Odysseus to come home, is a shrewd and resourceful moral agent, who tests Odysseus' character when he returns. Froma Zeitlin, a professor of classics at Princeton, has shown how rich and profound a symbol is the bed of Penelope, which is carved out of a tree still rooted in the ground. Penelope uses its secret structure as a test for establishing the identity of the man she so intimately connects with it. Knox is drawing on this body of work; indeed, Fagles lists Zeitlin as one of his consultants on the translation.

I do not know if Knox would be insulted at being called politically correct on women's issues; he has written some harsh things about academic trends. But it is true that a principal strength of Fagles's work is its entry into the psychological subtlety with which Homer presents women. That subtlety was always there, but few people saw it through the mists of histori-

BRIEFLY NOTED

Andorra, by Peter Cameron (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23). Ah, the expatriate life! Your very own turret in an old hotel; a soul-stirring vista; an Australian busybody with nice breasts and a gay husband; a rich girl with a tragic past; a nosy police lieutenant who questions you about the bodies that keep washing up in the harbor. Alexander Fox is our expat, a bookish American with an Oxonian lilt and fine tastes; he discovers that the Andorra he once read about in a novel bears no resemblance to the actual tiny country. The reader finds that Cameron has taken similar liberties in executing this marvellous mood piece about lying and truth-telling, escape and discovery, and the weird calm at the heart of desperation.

Alias Grace, by Margaret Atwood (Talese/Doubleday; $24.95). Atwood's ninth novel is based on the case of Grace Marks, who in 1843 was sentenced to life imprisonment for her role in the murders of her employer and his mistress. In this fictional rendition, three men try to spring the beautiful alleged murderess from prison, by way of religion, pre-Freudian analysis, and chicanery. They are viewed with a cold eye by both Grace and the author, who conveys the notion that all relations involve exploitation. Grace's previous life as a maid, however, furnishes a trove of nineteenth-century housekeeping details in which the reader can take pure pleasure.

Acceptable Losses, by Edra Ziesk (Southern Methodist; $22.50). In a small town on the Jersey Shore, a girl named Joellen comes home from a Fourth of July picnic to find that her mother has died in a car accident. Joe Handy goes to a fair with his father and then never sees him again. With delicate images—"as fine as the legs of a spider"—the author charts their loss-heavy lives. For the most part, the two Joes seem to fall into things: a job at the pharmacy; an apartment above a garage; the Vietnam War. When they eventually meet, they hang on for dear life, and their fierce, sex-filled relationship forms the crux of a world of startling beauty and grief.

Father and Son, by Larry Brown (Algonquin; $22.95). When Glen Davis renews old grudges after a three-year jail term on a state farm, the ensuing disasters feel inevitable. (For starters, Glen's half brother is sheriff.) The author follows the bloody trail of reprisals in such unflinching closeup that the writerly touches—his sureness with "Missippi" talk ("Have you lost your rabbit-assed mind?") and country ways (soothing a bull by scratching its head with a corncob)—are a relief; the reader can sense the regional patience that will outlast Glen's five-day scourge.

Love Warps the Mind a Little, by John Dufresne (Norton; $23). Lafayette Proulx is a flighty writer who has left his wife and moved in with a psychotherapist named Judi. But when Judi is found to have cancer, Laf stays to see her through her illness, cooking comfort food and waiting for the two troubled lovers in his latest story to reveal themselves. Dufresne's own characters are charming and absurd and perfectly believable—even Judi's stepfather, Hervey, who was once assaulted with a nail gun ("I didn't know about the nail till later when I tried to take off my hat").

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cal sexism—just as Jefferson failed to see Gothic churches through the superstitions of his rationalism. Fagles has been sensitized to women's issues, and it makes his translation truer than any other to Helen, charming in her penitence; to the solicitous witchings of Circe; to Calypso's baffled beauty; to slyness in the modesty of Nausicaa. And, above all, to the profoundly intelligent Penelope.

Some earlier critics praised Telemachus for showing his growing manhood by putting his mother "in her place," but Knox argues that he shows an adolescent chafing at authority. There is a serene control in the way Penelope turns aside her son's impatient outburst at her refusal to accept Odysseus at once:

> "If he is truly
> Odysseus, home at last, make no mistake:
> we two will know each other, even better—
> we two have secret signs,
> known to us both but hidden from the world."
> Odysseus, long enduring, broke into a smile
> and turned to his son with pointed, winging words:
> "Leave your mother here in the hall to test me."

The adults are fencing over the head of their perplexed son. Telemachus has just shown that he can, if he wants to, draw his father's bow, a feat of strength. But he does not have his father's mind. His mother does.

Penelope, in charge, will set the terms for accepting Odysseus, and he submits to her test. Odysseus' dog might drop dead the minute he sees him, but his wife will not drop into bed the minute he returns from a twenty years' absence. She must be won again. She uses the secret of their earth-rooted bed as a way of identifying his attitude toward it as well as his knowledge of its structure. When he calls her *daimonie* ("strange"), it is with a mixture of admiration and puzzlement. This "strange" has the feel of that lesser but interesting poet Oscar Hammerstein II: "You're a queer one, Julie Jordan."

> Strange woman! So hard—the gods of Olympus
> made you harder than any other woman in the world!
> What other wife could have a spirit so unbending?

Odysseus describes her as male heroes are described, for their tough steadiness. She gives him tit for tat:

> "Strange *man*,"
> wary Penelope said, "I'm not so proud, so scornful,
> nor am I overwhelmed by your quick change. . . .
> You look—how well I know—the way he looked,
> setting sail from Ithaca years ago
> aboard the long-oared ship."

So he is accepted? No, she is softening him up for the insult that will test him.

> "Come, Eurycleia,
> move the sturdy bedstead out of our bridal chamber—
> that room the master built with his own hands.
> Take it out now, sturdy bed that it is,
> and spread it deep with fleece,
> blankets and lustrous throws to keep him warm."
> Putting her husband to the proof—but Odysseus
> blazed up in fury, lashing out at his loyal wife.

He thinks she has cut the bed free from its roots in earth—thus revealing what the bed means to him. She is won now:

> You've conquered my heart, my hard heart, at last!

But she defends her hardness, maintained over the years, to fight off flattering hopes, the mere surrender to fresh wishes. She contrasts her situation with that of Helen, who ran off with Paris when a god bewildered her.

The mention of a divine intervention in this scene of perfect reconciliation should ring a bell. In the Iliad's scene of an imperfect reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon, the latter excuses his conduct by saying that a god had bewildered him. Bernard Williams, in a well-known recent discussion of that scene in the Iliad, proves that Agamemnon does not deny all responsibility when he claims impaired judgment—and so Penelope is not saying that Helen was blameless but that she lacked the full control Penelope displays. This scene is the greatest picture in all literature of a mature love demanded and bestowed on both sides equally. It is what defenders of "family values" look for in their books and, ironically, it is opened up for us by the "political correctness" that some family defenders denounce.

Chapman, it is true, had suspected the full meaning of this episode, but he could not quite bring it out in his translation. He had to insert a versified gloss in his own text, telling us what his rendering of Homer's lines left unclear:

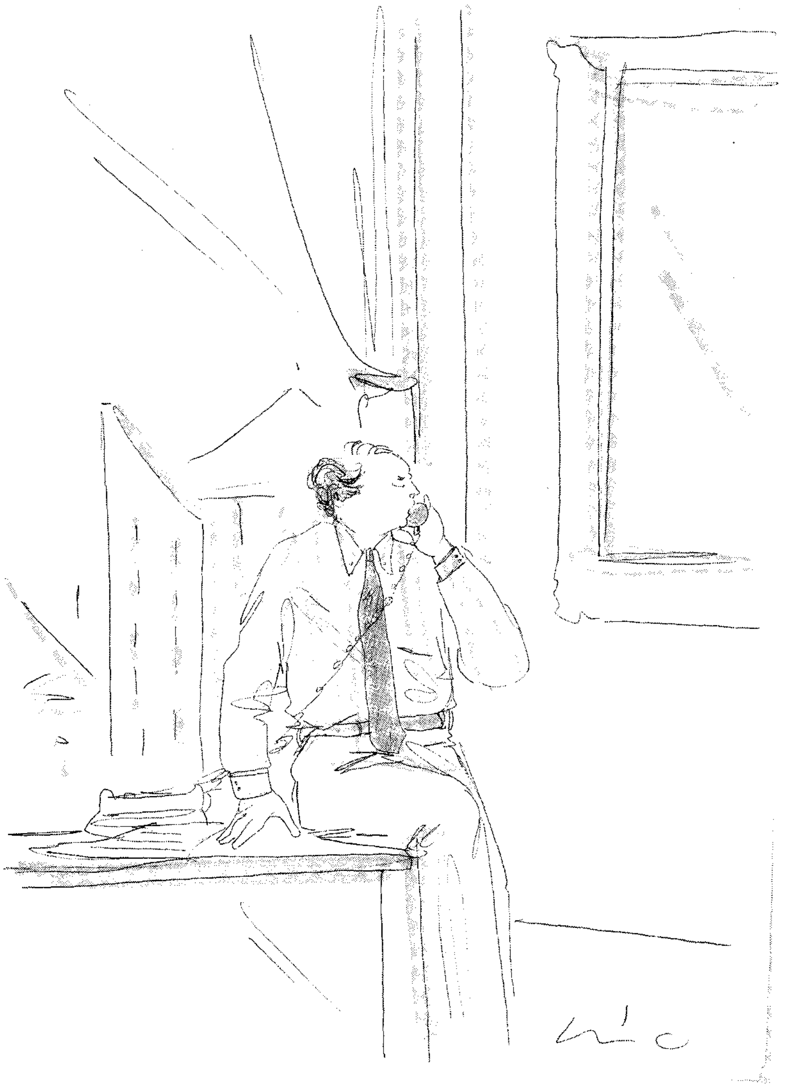
> These words of hers, so justifying her stay,
> Did more desire of joyful moan convey
> To his glad mind than if at instant sight
> She had allowed him all his wishes' right.
> He wept for joy, t'enjoy a wife so fit
> For his grave mind, that knew his depth
>   of wit.

The dramatist in Chapman made him understand Penelope's flashes of hope and despair in quick succession, and his Neoplatonism made him admire her control of such passions. But he could not quite accept her equality with a man. Fagles gets that—and all the rest—in the translation itself.

Good as Fagles is at the personal exchanges between men and women, he sometimes misses the exactly right touch when Odysseus is moving in the rougher world of men—the hauteur, for instance, with which Odysseus responds to those goading the old warrior into contests with young athletes in Scheria. With quiet resolve, Odysseus says, "Though burdened by old wounds, I will compete." ("*Peiresomai*" [8.184], answering the challenge "*peiresai*" [8.144], which Fagles rightly renders "Come and compete.") There is too much of the "Tennis, anyone?" in Fagles's "Nevertheless, despite so many blows, / I'll give your games a whirl." It makes matters worse, not better, that the first thing Odysseus does in the games is give a literal whirl to a discus.

In the same scene, quiet pride is made coyness when line 214 ("Name any sport, I am no weak contender") becomes "I'm not half bad in the world of games where men compete."

But these are small cavils over a major achievement. Consider how Fagles's flexible lines and clear narrative technique rush us up to one of Homer's climaxes, the performance of the bow trick. We pass, quickly, through two similes (lyre, swallow), a "reaction shot" (blanched



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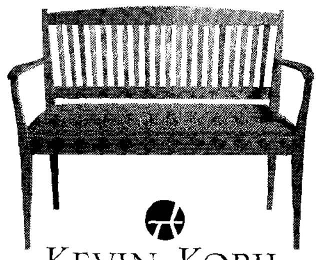

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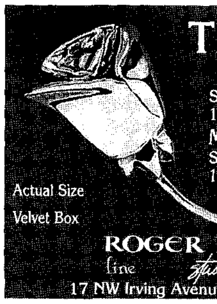

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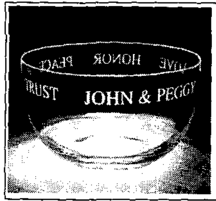

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suitors), an omen (lightning), a foreshadowing (the arrows will soon be killing suitors), and then the act itself, freighted with all this rapidly accumulated meaning:

> So they mocked, but Odysseus, mastermind in action,
> once he'd handled the great bow and scanned every inch,
> then, like an expert singer skilled at lyre and song—
> who strains a string to a new peg with ease,
> making the pliant sheep-gut fast at either end—
> so with his virtuoso ease Odysseus strung his mighty bow.
> Quickly his right hand plucked the string to test its pitch
> and under his touch it sang out clear and sharp as a swallow's cry.
> Horror swept through the suitors, faces blanching white,
> and Zeus cracked the sky with a bolt, his blazing sign,
> and the great man who had borne so much rejoiced at last
> that the son of cunning Cronus flung that omen down for *him*.
> He snatched a winged arrow lying bare on the board—
> the rest still bristled deep inside the quiver,
> soon to be tasted by all the feasters there.
> Setting shaft on the handgrip, drawing the notch
> and bowstring back, back . . . right from his stool,
> just as he sat but aiming straight and true, he let fly—
> and never missing an ax from the first ax-handle
> clean on through to the last and out
> the shaft with its weighted brazen head *shot free!*

The Odyssey is the part of Homer we are best equipped to appreciate, in this time of women's newly asserted dignity, and Fagles is the person best equipped to bring the epic to us. The 1961 translation by Robert Fitzgerald, the best modern one before Fagles's, is too slangy in its approach, and it moves loose from the text, adding things and omitting them. It is interesting to go back and read what Fagles wrote in the definitive Twickenham edition of Pope's translation (1967). He made a close comparison between Pope's own work and that of his two collaborators:

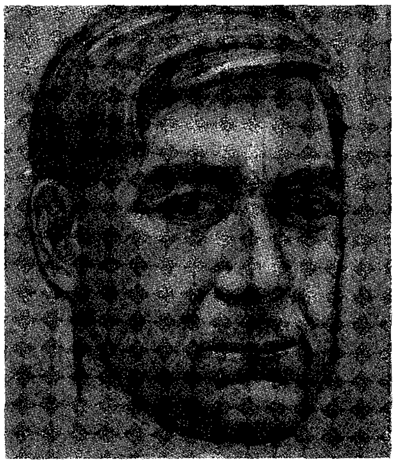
> His assistants translate as if they had their minds made up, would force on Homer a singleminded huffing idea of poetry, would write in competition with the Greek. On the contrary (to an extent) Pope collaborates with the Greek.

This generous critical assessment is one that Fagles has now earned for himself. ♦

LOVE YOU MADLY

An author's unique way with the macabre.

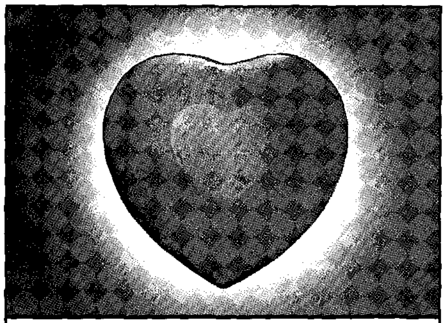
BY JOHN LANCHESTER


Patrick McGrath

TOM CURRY

THE psycho narrator—the narrator as pervert, madman, or good, old-fashioned multiple murderer—is such a staple of contemporary novels that he can seem as comfortably conventional as the deathbed scene in Victorian fiction. Patrick McGrath's superb novel "Asylum" (Random House; $22) comes up with a welcome twist on this now stock character, in that his psycho narrator is officially and professionally sane: being sensible about other people's madness is what Dr. Peter Cleave, a psychiatrist in a large English mental hospital, does for a living. Here is the book's thrillingly chilly opening sentence: "The catastrophic love affair characterized by sexual obsession has been a professional interest of mine for many years now."

The catastrophic love affair of particular interest to Cleave is the story of Edgar Stark and Stella Raphael. Edgar is a sculptor who became convinced that Ruth, his first wife, was being unfaithful, so he killed her, decapitated her, and then "enucleated" her—cut out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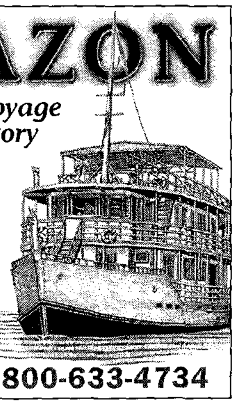
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her eyes. As the narrative begins, he has been in the hospital for five years, under Cleave's treatment. (To a British reader, the hospital in question seems likely to be modelled on Broadmoor, the country's most famous high-security mental institution—where, as it happens, McGrath's father was the medical superintendent; the novelist played on the grounds as a child.) Edgar is a big, handsome black-haired man, forceful, devious, and charming, who shows no insight into why he killed his wife, feels no guilt or remorse, and has no understanding that the beliefs that led him to commit his crime were wholly delusional. He is clinically paranoid but shows "not a flicker of psychosis"—in short, he's criminally insane. Stella Raphael, on the other hand, is a model citizen: the wife of Max Raphael, the deputy superintendent of the hospital, she's "a fleshy, full-breasted woman, taller than the average," and has a ten-year-old son called Charlie. "In those days," Cleave writes of the time before Edgar and Stella's affair, "I considered her a friend, and often wondered about her unconscious life."

Cleave's story begins with the only time that he ever saw Edgar and Stella together, at a hospital ball for staff and patients. (A typical Cleavism: "The truth is, the mentally ill are not at their best at a dance.") He watches the couple dance together and notices that Stella is becoming slightly flushed: we later learn that Edgar was pressing his erection into her groin. She had already developed an interest in him, after watching him work in her garden, but the incident of the "unruly penis" helped tip the balance. Edgar and Stella begin to have an affair, which for both quickly becomes outright sexual obsession. One day, after they have had sex in the Raphaels' marital bed for the first and only time, Edgar steals some of Max's clothes and absconds from the hospital. Soon afterward, Stella leaves her husband and son and runs off to join Edgar in a ratty London hideaway, and from this point, about a third of the way through the book, things really start to go wrong.

Admirers of McGrath's writing—"Asylum" is his fourth novel, and his work has been much praised in Britain—have come to look to him for an

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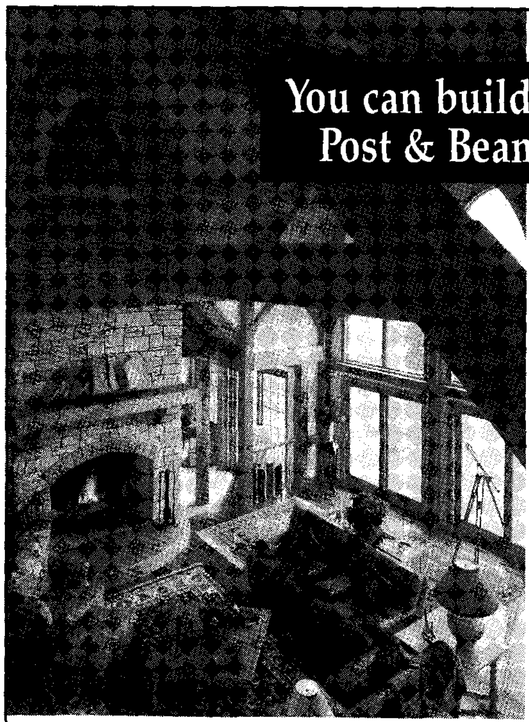

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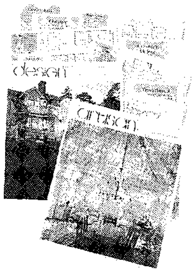

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ornate, deadpan style and for stories that unravel toward the disclosure of horror. His first novel was none too subtly entitled "The Grotesque," and if we were looking for a convenient label for his fiction we could use the title of an anthology that he coedited with Bradford Morrow, "The New Gothic." There's a lot of this about at the moment, but McGrath's work is distinguished by its unusual seriousness, its lack of camp; there's nothing jokey or ironic about "Asylum" 's version of the macabre. It is McGrath's most sombre and most realistic book, and also his best.

Initially, Cleave seems a humane and reasonable man, telling his story in a manner so detached that it almost seems to be in the third person. But as the story of Edgar and Stella charges headlong toward catastrophe, just the way Cleave has promised us it would, we realize he is not always to be trusted. His dislike of Max Raphael, for instance ("It was obvious to me the first time I met them that he wasn't the type to satisfy a woman like Stella"), begins by seeming reasonable but becomes increasingly suspicious, and he comes to seem less free of sexual and professional jealousy than he likes to pretend. On being asked about his own ambitions to run the hospital, Cleave laughs the question off: "It's a young man's game, running the big bins," our sixty-something hero says, yet his uncharacteristic, falsely jovial use of the colloquial term "bin" perhaps gives him away. It's no surprise when, toward the end of the novel, we find that Cleave has indeed become the medical superintendent, in which capacity he has special plans of a personal nature for a new patient, Stella Raphael.

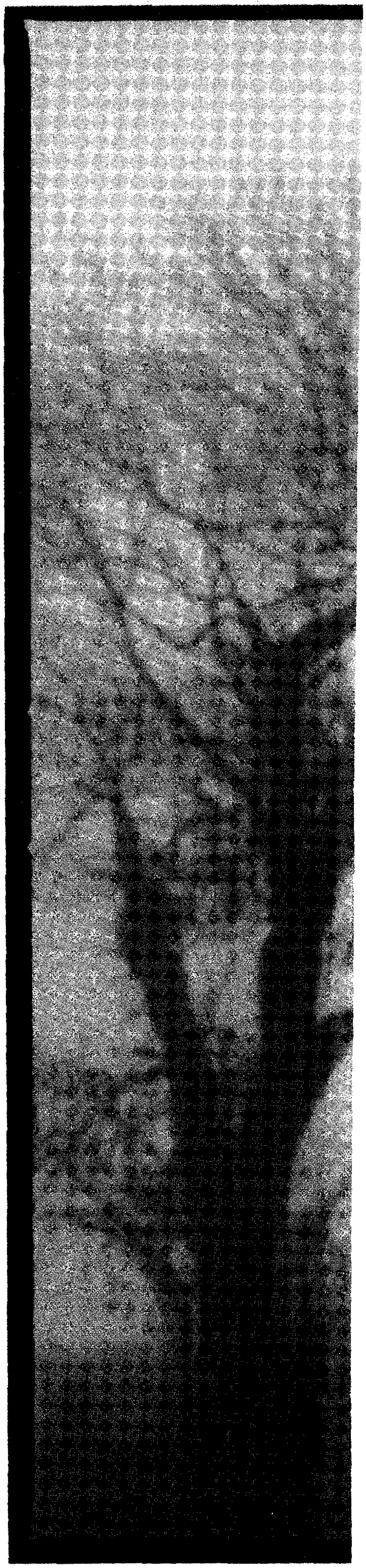
McGrath is obsessed with obsession, and in "Asylum" he brings the subject to life with brilliant darkness. It is a layered, implicating book, whose terrors and malignities aren't quite the ones we expect, and are a matter of mood and viewpoint as well as of plot. Just as "to cleave" can mean to sever or to join, an asylum can be a place of refuge or of incarceration. And so can a narrator's perspective. One of the novel's implied questions is: What do you call someone who is obsessed with madness and murder, with other people's torment? Answer: A psychiatrist. Or a reader. ♦

SHOWCASE BY DUDLEY REED

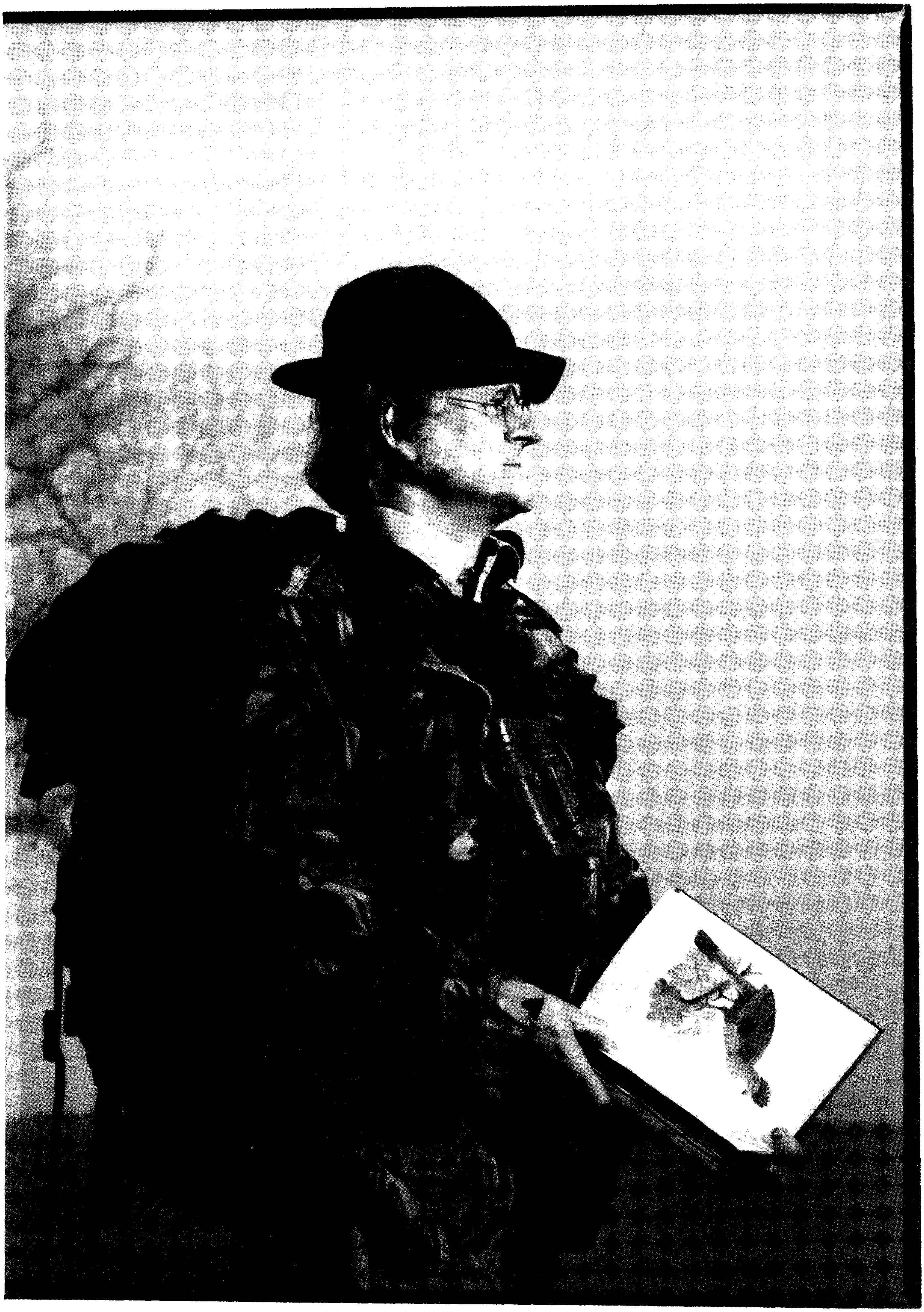
TRAVEL HORROR

IT seems reasonable to conclude that Redmond O'Hanlon is a man determined to be miserable. Fourteen years ago, he found misery in the relentlessly wet rain forests of the Borneo highlands. (The bright spot of the day was brushing your teeth—"the only bit of you you can keep clean.") But he also found comedy, sometimes provided by his travel companion, the poet James Fenton, who—having stepped into their dugout canoe in a straw boater, Oxford trousers, and a white cotton shirt, and bearing a new edition of Jonathan Swift's complete poems—ended up the sober foil to O'Hanlon's wilder antics: not a role to be wished for, even though later others seemed eager to take it on. In 1985, O'Hanlon found misery among the parasites in the Amazon (something of a pedant in the business of parasites, he identifies many delightful varieties), notably the candiru, the "toothpick fish," which follows the scent of urine until it finds a home in a victim's urethra, where, cozily settling in, it raises its gill covers and sticks out its retrorse spines: "Nothing can be done." The pain, O'Hanlon reports, is "spectacular." His companion on this trip was Simon Stockton, bachelor bon vivant and croupier at an upmarket London casino, who wasn't entirely prepared for the trials awaiting him: halfway through, he went a little mad and, abandoning the nightmare naturalist to his own devices, asked the local militia to lead him out of the jungle. The aptly titled "In Trouble Again" captures the quality of O'Hanlon's experiences in the Amazon basin.

"No Mercy: A Journey to the Heart of the Congo," one of the highlights of the spring publishing season, is O'Hanlon's third travel adventure. His companion this time is Lary Shaffer, M.S. victim extraordinaire: crippled and rendered nearly blind by his illness, Shaffer had managed to regain sight and strength and, among other feats of endurance, had just crossed America on a bicycle when he got the invitation from O'Hanlon to join him on a six-month trip into the heart of the heart of hell, in order to get a glimpse of the Congo dinosaur. The Congo dinosaur? Alas, poor Mr. Shaffer. —BILL BUFORD



Redmond O'Hanlon at home in Oxfordshire.



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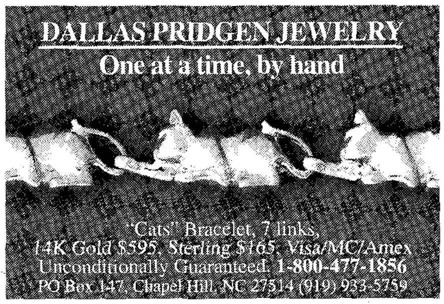

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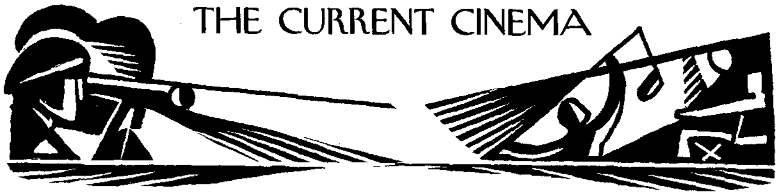


DIFFERENT WORLDS

"The Whole Wide World" and "Some Mother's Son."

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

Robert E. Howard (Vincent D'Onofrio), the hero of Dan Ireland's "The Whole Wide World," is a strapping, ungainly man who lives with his father and his invalid mother in a small West Texas town and is looked on by his God-fearing neighbors as a misfit: he's a writer. In the period the movie covers—1933 to 1936—he's actually quite a famous writer, but his "yarns" (as he refers to them) aren't what the respectable folks of Cross Plains consider good, edifying literature. His most popular tales are bloody adventures about a virile barbarian named Conan, which appear in a luridly illustrated pulp magazine called *Weird Tales;* Conan's activities, Howard tells a friend, consist of "drinking, whoring, and fighting," because "what else is there to do in life?" In fact, Howard's own brief life—he killed himself in 1936, at the age of thirty—was both less exciting and far more complex than that. The screenplay of "The Whole Wide World" (written by Michael Scott Myers) is based on a 1986 memoir, "One Who Walked Alone," by Novalyne Price Ellis, one of the few people who knew Howard well; he didn't have much use for the social life of Cross Plains, and he worked in near-total isolation from other writers. (He corresponded, however, with the horror writer H. P. Lovecraft.) In this movie, Bob Howard, hunched over a typewriter in rural Texas and dreaming a mythic prehistory, looks like the loneliest man who ever practiced the lonely profession of writing. He's less a literary lion than a literary coyote: a solitary scavenger of the imagination, roaming hungrily in an immense landscape.

When Novalyne Price (Renée Zellweger) is introduced to Howard, she is told that he is "the greatest pulp writer in the whole world," and she's impressed—mostly because he's the *only* writer, of any kind, in the small social world she inhabits. To Novalyne, who has tried and failed to sell fiction to true-confessions magazines, Howard (whose work she has never read) is simply the man with the secret of literary success. A year or so after their initial meeting, Novalyne accepts a job as a speech-and-drama teacher in Cross Plains and seeks out Howard; over the next couple of years, their relationship turns into something more complicated, more ambiguous, and, ultimately, more disturbing than the bookish friendship she envisioned. Most of their dates take the form of long drives through the countryside, during which Bob expatiates on the brutal nature of man and the corrupt state of modern civilization. These crude theories aren't exactly the professional wisdom that Novalyne hoped for, but she comes to realize that, in a sense, Howard's fanatic conviction *is* the secret of his success—the single, unlearnable trick of the pulp writer's trade. At one point, he questions the authenticity of one of Novalyne's domestic stories, and she retaliates by pointing out that she hasn't seen many of the creatures that inhabit his stories—the lusty he-men, the voluptuous half-naked women, the giant serpents—around Cross Plains. He replies, very quietly, "But I have."

And, as D'Onofrio plays him, you know that Howard is telling the truth. The power of his ludicrous, vivid prehistoric fantasies derives from an ornery unwillingness (or, perhaps, an inability) to abandon the wild and clamorous home ground of a boy's imagination. D'Onofrio's Howard is a man-child whose fictional world is the pure expression of a kind of heroic self-delusion. When he's at work, he shouts dialogue aloud and acts out bits of the story: he writes the way a shut-in only child plays; that is, with the aim of magnifying a reality that seems to him too skimpy, too narrow, too constricting. D'Onofrio brilliantly captures the stress and the bewildered pain of Robert

Howard's attempt to carry that adolescent romanticism, unchanged, into adulthood. Howard is a troubled and apparently contradictory character—an infuriating mixture of bravery and cowardice, of arrogance and insecurity—but D'Onofrio, avoiding both pathos and easy irony, brings out the strange consistency of his personality. He makes us understand that Howard's obsession with the distant past and his unnatural devotion to his ailing mother (Ann Wedgeworth) are somehow of a piece: both qualities are aspects of an all-consuming struggle to assert the continuity of his identity—to hang on to everything that allows him to see himself as a strong, clear *story*, and not merely as a wandering and confused man.

On the verge of intimacy: Zellweger and D'Onofrio in "The Whole Wide World."

Novalyne, who has the skeptical and practical intelligence of a grownup, sees Bob Howard as he is, and in the course of an up-and-down courtship she often has reason to regret that she does: she's alternately charmed by his innocence and repelled by it. She's too sane to let herself be held captive in his mythic kingdom of adolescence; he keeps launching forays into her territory and then retreating to the safety of his own domain. In "The Whole Wide World," this relationship, while remaining unconsummated and essentially static, changes constantly, like the landscapes that Bob and Novalyne pass through on their aimless but oddly intense drives: at times, they appear to be on the verge of an extraordinary intimacy; at other times, they seem like strangers crossing a desert in opposite directions, eying one another warily and then deciding to go their separate ways. Myers's screenplay, bravely, respects the ambivalent emotions and the relatively undramatic narrative development of Novalyne's memoir, and Ireland (a first-time director) guides us smoothly over the story's turbulent, irregular course: "The Whole Wide World" conveys the thrilling unpredictability of a real relationship and dignifies it with the even, rising-and-falling rhythm of an elegy.

Renée Zellweger's Novalyne is the ideal embodiment of the picture's unusual, down-to-earth sort of lyricism. Novalyne is generous, sensitive, and tough-minded. She is sympathetic to Bob's eccentric romanticism but is temperamentally unsuited to it herself: she can't help comparing his absolutist visions with the everyday reality she knows. Her debates with the blustery writer have the snap of screwball comedy, because Zellweger seems to have found her own sort of connection to a mythic past: she reanimates the sweet but fiercely independent spirit of the working-girl heroines that Jean Arthur once played. Like Arthur, Zellweger knows how to depict the conflicting feelings of women who haven't quite settled on who they are but are quite clear about who they're not, and that's exactly the quality that this movie's heroine needs. Novalyne's youthful insecurities, unlike Bob's, don't weaken her: she reminds us that the youthful adventure of carving out an identity doesn't have to be a bloody battle, a duel to the death with yourself.

Howard, in a letter to Lovecraft, mythicized his own writing as the activity of a rugged, fearless outcast: "I was the first to light a torch of literature in this part of the country. . . . I am, in my way, a pioneer." Pathetic and self-aggrandizing though that may sound, he had a point. His impulse as a writer was to reduce human behavior to its most elemental components, and his stories, for all their hyperbole and purple prose, do dramatize something fundamental: an unhappy man's struggle for emotional survival. It's rare to see the basic conditions of a writer's existence—the solitude, the panic, the neediness, the unhealthy self-absorption—portrayed so starkly. In "The Whole Wide World," Robert E. Howard seems as desperate and as callow as Billy the Kid: he writes fast, dies young, and desires, in the end, only to leave behind a beautiful myth. Novalyne Price's memories replace that self-created myth with something better: they show us the man Bob Howard couldn't see when he looked in the mirror.

THERE'S a different kind of heroic fantasy on display in Terry George's "Some Mother's Son." This political docudrama, written by George and Jim Sheridan, tells the story of the hunger strike undertaken by Republican—mostly I.R.A.—prisoners in Northern Ireland's Maze (or Long Kesh) jail in 1981. The strikers, led by the zealous Bobby Sands (John Lynch), mean to force the British government, led by the equally intransigent Margaret Thatcher, to treat the inmates as prisoners of war rather than as criminals: the symbolic issue is their right to wear their own clothes instead of convicts' uniforms. Both the strikers and their British adversaries seem completely mad, and the representatives of other interested groups—elected officials, Sinn Fein leaders, Catholic clergymen—are paralyzed either by their political agendas or by simple confusion. Wisely, George keeps everyone but the protesters' families at arm's length. Two mothers, played by Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan, carry the burden of the drama. In their anguished impotence we see the human consequences of their sons' stubborn willingness to join the crowded ranks of Irish Republican martyrs; the mothers aren't nearly so keen on making history. The script is a little cavalier with the facts of the protest, and George's direction is mostly just serviceable; but Mirren and Flanagan are terrific, and the movie, in its blunt, foursquare way, does manage to evoke the tragic insanity of the events. In Northern Ireland, the past is always present, and the future is static. This kind of continuity—rigid, clear-cut, and inexorable—is what turns men into barbarians. ♦

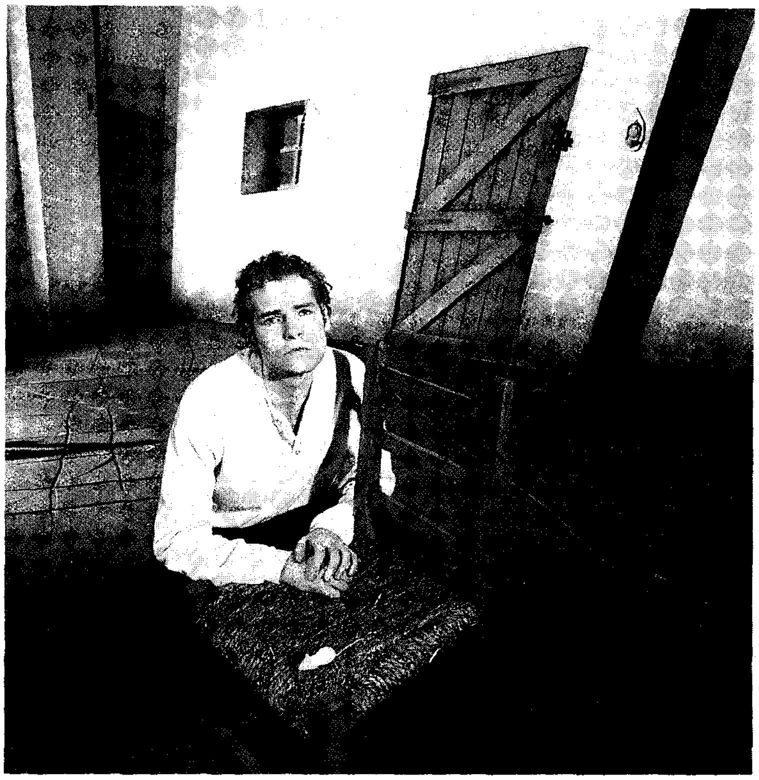
THE THEATRE

THE GIFT OF GAB

A new Irish yarn spinner has London in his thrall.

BY JOHN LAHR

THIS year's bragging rights in English drama belong to the twenty-six-year-old London-based Irishman Martin McDonagh, whose hair is prematurely silver and whose mind has a preternatural gift for storytelling. McDonagh has neither the poetry nor the profundity of other new Irish dramatists—like Sebastian Barry, whose majestic "The Steward of Christendom," in the original Out of Joint production, with Donal McCann, opens at the Brooklyn Academy of Music this week for a month's run—but his vivacious fairy tales of desperation about backwater Irish life display an uncanny sense of character, comedy, and construction. In "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" (at the Royal Court Downstairs, in the Duke of York's Theatre), which last November won McDonagh the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright, a dutiful daughter's chance at marriage is destroyed by her manipulative mother; the daughter dispatches the old bat with all the gleeful redemptive violence of the woodsman knocking off the wolf to save the almost devoured Little Red Ridinghood. On opening night, the sophisticated London audience was so caught up in the primal battle between mother and daughter that some people actually hissed the witchy mother when she coaxed the suitor's letter of proposal to her daughter out of a cloddish messenger and threw it into the fire. The power of McDonagh's story transcends its lacklustre direction, by Garry Hynes; McDonagh's second outing, "The Cripple of Inishmaan," elegantly directed by Nicholas Hytner (at the Royal National's Cottesloe Theatre), is a more polished and more persuasive evening. McDonagh,



The twenty-six-year-old McDonagh: writing vivacious fairy tales about backwater Irish life. Photograph by Dudley Reed.

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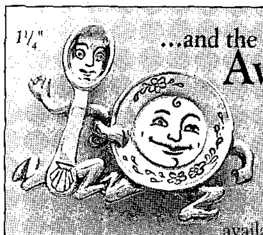

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who has set the play on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland in 1934, puts a wider cast of characters through more complicated reversals of plot, and spins a tragicomic yarn about the mutation of spirit that is a byproduct of the landscape's punishing emptiness.

The island's scuffed and monumental granite cliffs, which dominate the background of Bob Crowley's spectacular set, have taken a brutal beating from nature; so, we learn, have the people who inhabit them. At the village store, where seventeen-year-old Cripple Billy Claven (the lanky, sweet-faced Ruaidhri Conroy) lives with his two maiden caretakers—the childlike "Aunt" Kate (Anita Reeves) and the starchy "Aunt" Eileen (Dearbhla Molloy)—the windows, the walls, the shelves of canned peas, and even the counter are cantilevered like elements in a Cubist painting. Crowley's set marries the real and the surreal and foreshadows McDonagh's storytelling style, which has the clarity and power of fable. Each character enters not only with his own idiosyncrasy but with his own distinct idiom. McDonagh skillfully juggles rhythms and repetitions so as to illuminate the sadness, defensiveness, and longing for connection underneath the characters' badinage. For instance, before we see Cripple Billy, his profound disadvantage is relayed to us by the two shopkeeping aunties, who pass judgment on his disability without seeing their own:

> EILEEN: Poor Billy'll never be getting kissed. Unless it was be a blind girl.
> KATE: A blind girl or a backward girl.
> EILEEN: Or Jim Finnegan's daughter.
> KATE: She'd kiss anything.
> EILEEN: She'd kiss a bald donkey.
> KATE: She'd kiss a bald donkey. And she'd still probably draw the line at Billy. Poor Billy.

McDonagh knows that the trick of the tale is to delay revelation, and he gives this narrative insight to the town gossip, Johnnypateenmike (Ray McBride), who trades tidbits of local news for food. "I will get on with me three pieces of news so," he tells his listeners. "I will leave me best piece of news till the end so's you will be waiting for it." As promised, just after Johnnypateenmike has revealed that a certain villager threw his Bible into the sea and that Jack Ellery's goose bit Pat Brennan's cat, and the audience is waiting for "about the biggest piece of news Johnnypateenmike has ever had," Cripple Billy makes his entrance and forestalls the payoff. This is not simple stuff to engineer, but McDonagh makes it look easy. The audience is hooked. Decrepit, coughing, doe-eyed, and dreamy, Billy shuffles into view: a rumpled body with a sharp wit. He asks Johnnypateenmike to stop calling him Cripple, and says, "Well, do I go calling you Johnnypateenmike with news that's so boring it'd bore the head off a dead bee'?" But when the news is finally broadcast it is big indeed. The American filmmaker Robert Flaherty is shooting "Man of Aran" on a neighboring island. An opportunity has appeared on the villagers' bleak horizon, and Billy is not the only one to grasp at this flimsy straw.

The news also captures the manic imagination of Slippy Helen, a tatterdemalion termagant, who is made hilariously memorable by the high-spirited Aisling O'Sullivan. She swaggers around the stage in her wasp-waisted threadbare raincoat and torn tights, alternately browbeating her oafish little brother, Bartley (Owen Sharpe), and giving lip to anyone who crosses her path. Slippy Helen is so called because she's forever "dropping" the eggs she's supposed to deliver to the store. "I didn't drop them eggs at all," she tells Eileen. "I went pegging them at Father Barratt, got him bang in the gob with fecking four of them." This information news appalls and bewilders Eileen. "Sure, pegging eggs at a priest, isn't it pure against God?" she asks. To which Helen replies, "Oh, maybe it is, but if God went touching me arse in choir practice I'd peg eggs at that fecker, too."

McDonagh never lets the audience get ahead of his story; he adroitly turns the tables on every expectation. Cripple Billy, by forging a doctor's letter saying he has tuberculosis—a piece of emotional panhandling that later comes true—talks himself onto the boat taking Helen to Aran and Flaherty's production. Billy, not Helen, gets to Hollywood for a screen test. "But they didn't want me," he explains, back in Inishmaan. "A blond lad from Fort Lauderdale they hired instead of me. He wasn't crippled at all, but the Yank said 'Ah, better to get a normal fella who can act crippled than a crippled fella who can't fecking act at all.' " His travels have at least clarified his feelings for Slippy Helen; eventually, he plucks up the courage to ask her out walking. "It isn't out walking you'd be anyways, it would be out shuffling, because you can't walk," she says, and asks him, "What would you and me want to be out shuffling for?" "For the company," Billy says. "And for the way sweethearts be." At these words of endearment, Slippy Helen spends a full thirty seconds trying to contain her sniggering before shutting the shop door

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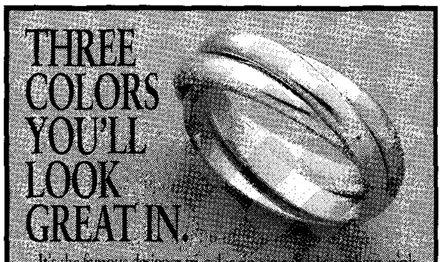

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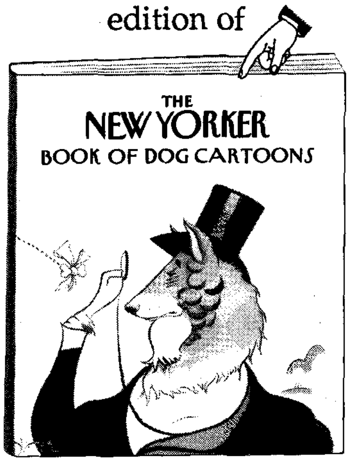

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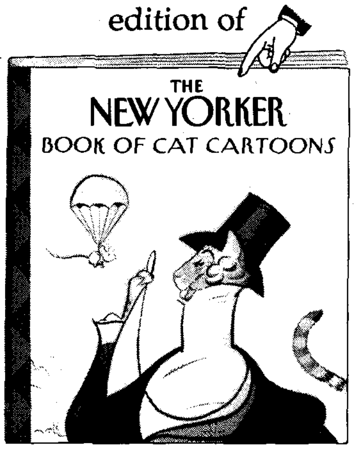

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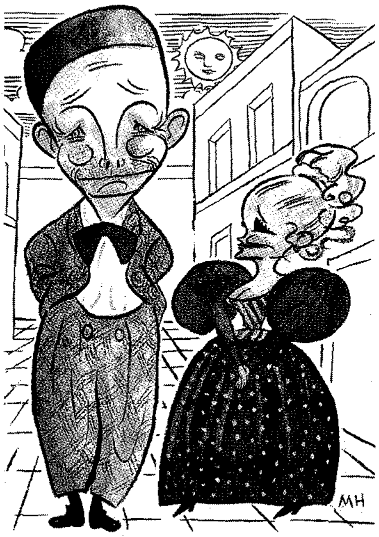
on Billy and his humiliation without so much as a goodbye. Minutes later, as the devastated Billy is about to leave home for a second time, Slippy Helen sticks her head back inside the door. "All right so I'll go out walking with ya," she says, "but only somewheres no fecker would see us and when it's dark and no kissing or groping, cos I don't want you ruining my fecking reputation," but, of course, she relents and kisses him before she exits. Cripple Billy is finally embraced. In that stunned and wonderful moment, his manhood and the promise of joy are confirmed. Billy laughs; then, just as suddenly, McDonagh wipes the smile off both his face and ours. Billy coughs and starts to spit blood. The lights fade on him looking at his hand—the promise of joy replaced by the promise of death. It's a destiny of impoverishment as desolate and unforgiving as the dark rocks that loom in the background behind him.

McDonagh's prospects, by contrast, seem assured. He's a natural, who has most certainly arrived. In the way of the English press, McDonagh has been discovered, ballyhooed, published, and despised all in one year. But his characterizations and the richness of his comedy insure a healthy commercial life for his plays, both of which should be in New York by the end of the year. "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" is the first of what McDonagh calls his Connemara Trilogy; the next two plays—"A Skull in Connemara" and "The Lonesome West"—will be produced by the Royal Court in conjunction with the Druid Theatre. Meanwhile, McDonagh, who has a few more plays yet in his trunk, says he has talked with the American producer Scott Rudin ("The Addams Family," "The First Wives' Club") about writing a screenplay, which he has already begun work on. He "only saw eight plays" when he was growing up, he says, and was "always more interested in films than theatre," so Hollywood may seem an easy fit. It's not facility but maturity, however, that McDonagh requires to turn his great gift into great drama. And if he can find maturity in Hollywood he really will have the luck of the Irish. ♦

SEND IN THE CLOWN

Molière in baggy pants; a black childhood made vivid.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



Bill Irwin with Kristin Chenoweth.

MARCELLUS HALL

BILL IRWIN'S clown persona can sometimes seem a little bland; the brilliance of "Fool Moon," his new-vaudeville show of several years back, owed a lot to the sharp contrast, the friction, between Irwin and his partner, David Shiner: Shiner was a bullish id in a china shop to Irwin's wide-eyed kid in a candy store. In Irwin's freewheeling production of Molière's "Scapin," now at the Roundabout, in which he has pulled off the hat trick of directing, starring, and, with the humorist and playwright Mark O'Donnell, adapting, he's the compleat clown, holding the ensemble together with his sweetness and keeping all the pieces in motion with goosey anarchy. In cartoon terms, it's Disney meets Warner Bros. Irwin, who is forty-six, has said that his earliest influence was TV, and his characterization of Scapin calls up a certain *lapin:* it's clear that Bugs Bunny has left his paw prints on Irwin's resourceful scamp.

So inspired is Irwin's work here that he must have consulted directly with Molière, perhaps using the same phone lines that Hillary Clinton used for calling Eleanor Roosevelt. He and O'Donnell, whose work has an ethereal, out-of-left-field quality, have compressed and updated the script in a way that never seems falsely anachronistic, as, say, Shakespeare done with actors dressed like Chicago gangsters does. What they have done, basically, is get the play out of the way—the farcical plot of "Scapin" is irrelevant—to make room for the baggy-pants shtick that is Irwin's bread and butter. And the set has the simple black lines of a page from a coloring book: the characters get all the attention. In the matter of casting, Irwin has done theatregoers a great favor by bringing Christopher Evan Welch with him from Seattle (this "Scapin" was first performed at the Seattle Repertory Theatre last year) to reprise the role of Sylvestre. Both characters are servants of rather hapless young men, and it is in the nature of their position that they have the better lines (q.v. Jeeves and Bertie Wooster). But Irwin and Welch also give their characters a vivid physical dimension, and they work together like acrobats. It's no surprise, of course, that Irwin can hold the stage through an evening of sustained physical comedy, but Welch is making his New York début, and, with his rubbery face and his large but collapsible frame, he shows himself to be Irwin's equal.

WHAT'S to be treasured about Irwin as a creator and a performer is that he's been able to take what he loves from the past and make it come alive in the present. He carries a lot of baggage, yet he travels light: when he puts an organist in the show, playing oldies like "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" before curtain time and then giving silent-movie cues throughout the play, or when he makes corny show-biz references, he's letting the baggage carry *him*—into the future. The confidence that Irwin has in the inherent magic of theatre is rare, which is unfortunate, because it's exactly what the theatre needs. The much discussed problem of where to find and how to capture the theatre audience of the future is a real one—evidenced to me most recently at the Manhattan Theatre Club, at a performance of "Neat," a one-woman show written and acted by Charlayne Woodard. (It's a companion piece to "Pretty Fire," which Woodard presented at M.T.C. four years ago.) On a Friday night, the audience of some hundred and fifty—watching a show about race in America, about growing up black in the sixties—was a sea of gray (hair) and white (skin). The youngest people appeared to be in their mid-thirties, and there were exactly four non-Caucasians in the audience.

As for the play itself, Woodard has a terrific, vivid story to tell. Episodes from her childhood are interlaced with anecdotes about her aunt Beneatha, who is called Neat by the family. Neat suffered brain damage as an infant, when her grandmother, who couldn't read, accidentally gave her a dose of camphor oil instead of cod-liver oil. Neat's mother rushed her to the nearest hospital, a whites-only hospital, where the doctors and nurses regarded her "as if she was offering them poison"; by the time she could get across town to the hospital for colored people, the most the doctors could do was keep Neat alive. As Neat grows up, she remains childlike; for Woodard, she was a source of pride, inspiration, and, sometimes, consternation. Woodard's show evoked the same feelings in me at various times: her depictions of her older relatives were lovingly observant, and her imitation of a teenage Lothario she had a crush on was priceless, but her portrayal of herself as a child was unbearably cutesy and false. She has exposed much of herself in this show, but she has also packaged her emotions a little too tidily, avoiding rawness in favor of wryness. Though the material doesn't quite work as a play, the tales themselves are unforgettable; with some much needed editing, "Neat" would make a wonderful children's book, and I mean that as a compliment. ♦

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[*From a letter in the Old Saybrook (Conn.) Pictorial Gazette*]

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BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

You can't find these things anywhere else unless you have inside connections.—*QVC hostess, hawking Clinton Inaugural trinkets.*

"Here we have these Inaugural license plates. Aren't they official-looking? Slap one on your car and people will think you're part of the Presidential motorcade. Terry, as co-chairman of the Inaugural Committee, I bet you have one."

"You bet your bumper I do, Judy. In fact, I have two."

"Tell us a little more about them."

"They're made of steel, they're painted in patriotic rust-proof red, white, and blue. But the most distinctive thing about them is that each is individually hand-stamped in federal prison by former Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell."

"They must be incredibly valuable."

"Judy, I don't think you can put a price on something like this. But, believe it or not, we have—just $29.95 if you call in the next five minutes."

"How many do we have left?"

"As many as the viewers out there want, long as Webb's arms don't get too tired."

"Tell us about the next item."

"Hair Force One styling gel. And if you order twenty-four bottles you'll get this blow-dryer absolutely free. It's a replica of the plane that the President and his top contributors fly around in. See how powerful it is?"

"I'll say—feels like we just took off! Now what's this?"

"Item No. 297 comes with a very special offer: your own personal F.B.I. file, declassified, with handwritten notes in the margins by former head of White House security Craig Livingstone."

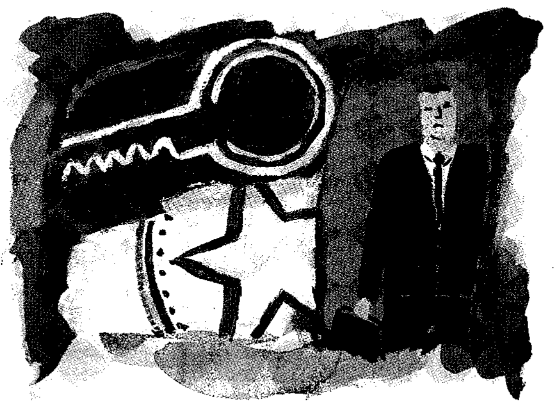
"Fantastic! Is this, you know, legal?"

"Hey, that's not my department. But we figure if the President can have them, why can't you?"

"What's that on the cover? Looks like a smudge or something."

"That's an authentic Craig Livingstone beer stain. You might not know it, but he used to work in a bar before he became head of security for the executive branch. And if you place your order before happy hour is over Craig will spill the liquor of your choice on your file, no extra charge."

"Incredible. What else do you have?"



"This? It's an Arkansas state trooper's badge."

"It looks so real."

"I wouldn't try using it to arrest someone, but it's a great conversation piece at bars, in convention halls, wherever. *The Governor would like to see you right away in his hotel room, Miss.*"

"You sure had me fooled. Speaking of that, tell the viewers about the bonus item they'll get if they act fast."

"You mean the Paula Jones Chia Pet."

"Which end is up?"

"This way. You just water Paula's head every day and watch her hair grow and grow and grow. Within a week, it's as big as the real thing, only green."

"What an ideal Valentine's Day gift!"

"And if you have abominable abdominals—whew, that's hard to say—then this is for you: it's the 1600 Series Home Abdominal Roller. Testing done on congressional pages in our Ab Lab show that just four minutes a day will make your stomach as flat as Pennsylvania Avenue."

"Fab! Wait, hold the phones! We've just had our hundredth call for Item No. 321."

"Which is?"

"The Dick Morris key chain, with lucky-foot charm. And for those who've already placed an order it comes with this key."

"That's right, Judy. It's an exact replica of the key to Room 205 of the Jefferson Hotel, in downtown Washington, D.C., where Dick—who you'll remember advised the President on family values—used to meet with his special friend, to discuss the Vice-President's speeches."

"Will it actually open the door?"

"I guess that's between those lucky hundred callers and the management of the Jefferson."

"This next item looks like—what, a training collar for hunting dogs?"

"We're so excited about this, Judy. It's the Official Team Clinton Electronic Ankle Bracelet. It sends a signal to the Marshal's office if you leave the house when you're not supposed to, like while you're waiting to be sentenced for obstruction of justice. One size fits all."

"Are batteries included?"

"No, but I'd check first with the Marshal before running out to the convenience store to buy some."

"Maybe the folks at home won't need the bracelet if they have this last item. Describe it for us, Terry."

"It's a One-Hour Consultation with a top Washington, D.C., criminal-defense attorney. Check out the full retail value—$475."

"Yowza! But how are you able to offer it for the incredibly low price of $125?"

"This Administration buys in bulk."

"Lucky for us. Time for one last item. Looks like a biggie. What is it?"

"An entire African village, Judy, personally visited by Mrs. Clinton."

"Great. And what does it . . . do?"

"Raises your child."

"Wow, could I use one of those." ♦

"I know it's late, but I'd like some sushi. How far do I have to go?"

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You needn't ever leave the comfort of your Four Seasons room to be transported by a talented chef. Room service menus abound with regional selections: from deep-dish pizza, to striped bass without unwanted calories, to homemade chicken soup at midnight. For the same breadth of choice in another unequalled setting, visit our restaurants downstairs. In this value-conscious era, the demands of business demand nothing less. For reservations, phone your travel counsellor or call us toll free.

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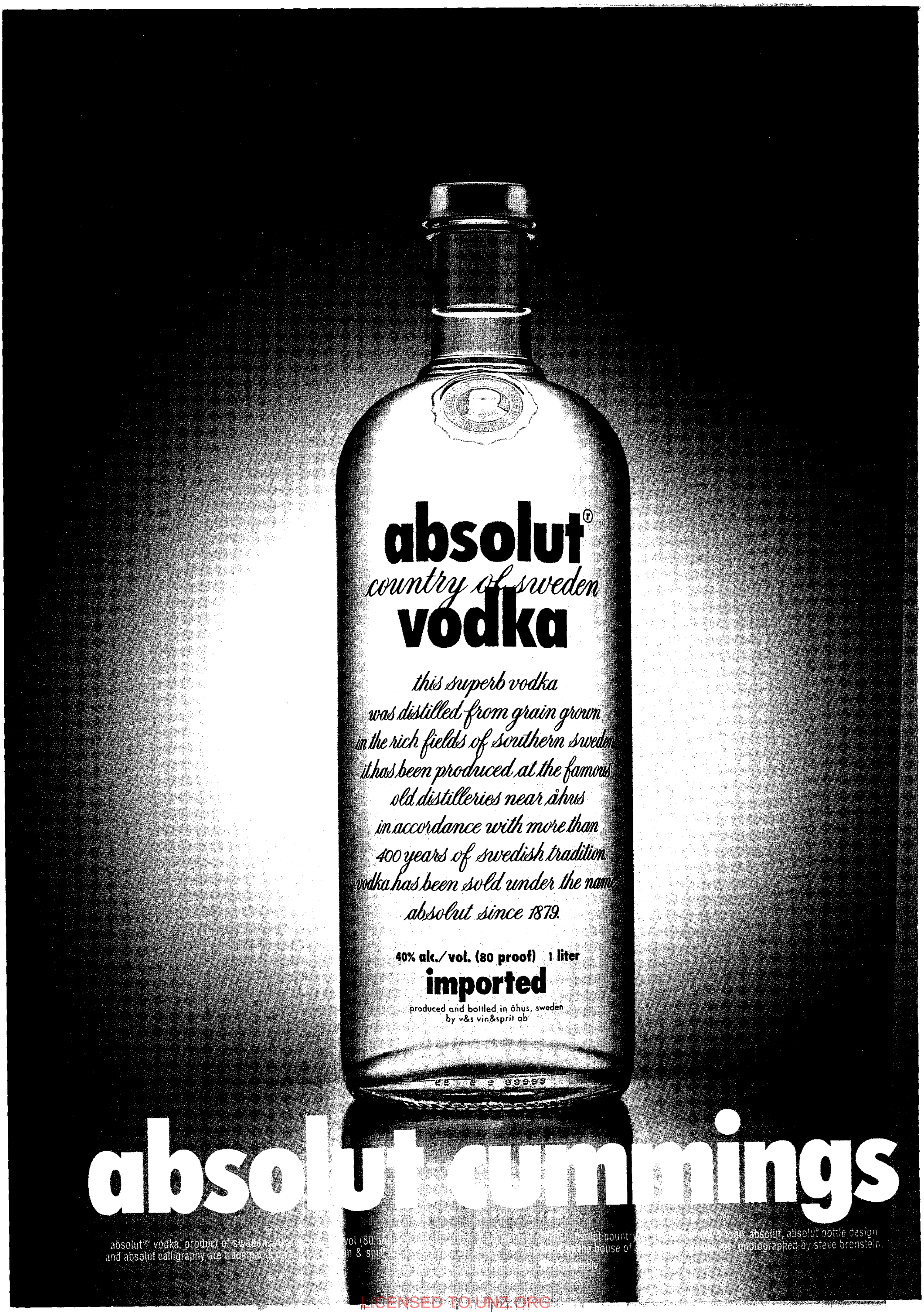
absolut®
country of sweden
vodka
this superb vodka
was distilled from grain grown
in the rich fields of southern sweden
it has been produced at the famous
old distilleries near åhus
in accordance with more than
400 years of swedish tradition
vodka has been sold under the name
absolut since 1879.
40% alc./vol. (80 proof) 1 liter
imported
produced and bottled in åhus, sweden
by v&s vin&sprit ab
absolut cummings
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